A CENTURY OF CINEMA

Ingmar Bergman

Miloš Forman

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

Mani Kaul

Abbas Kiarostami

Mike Leigh

Marcello Mastroianni

Jean-Paul Rappeneau

Krzysztof Zanussi

and an essay
by Elie Faure

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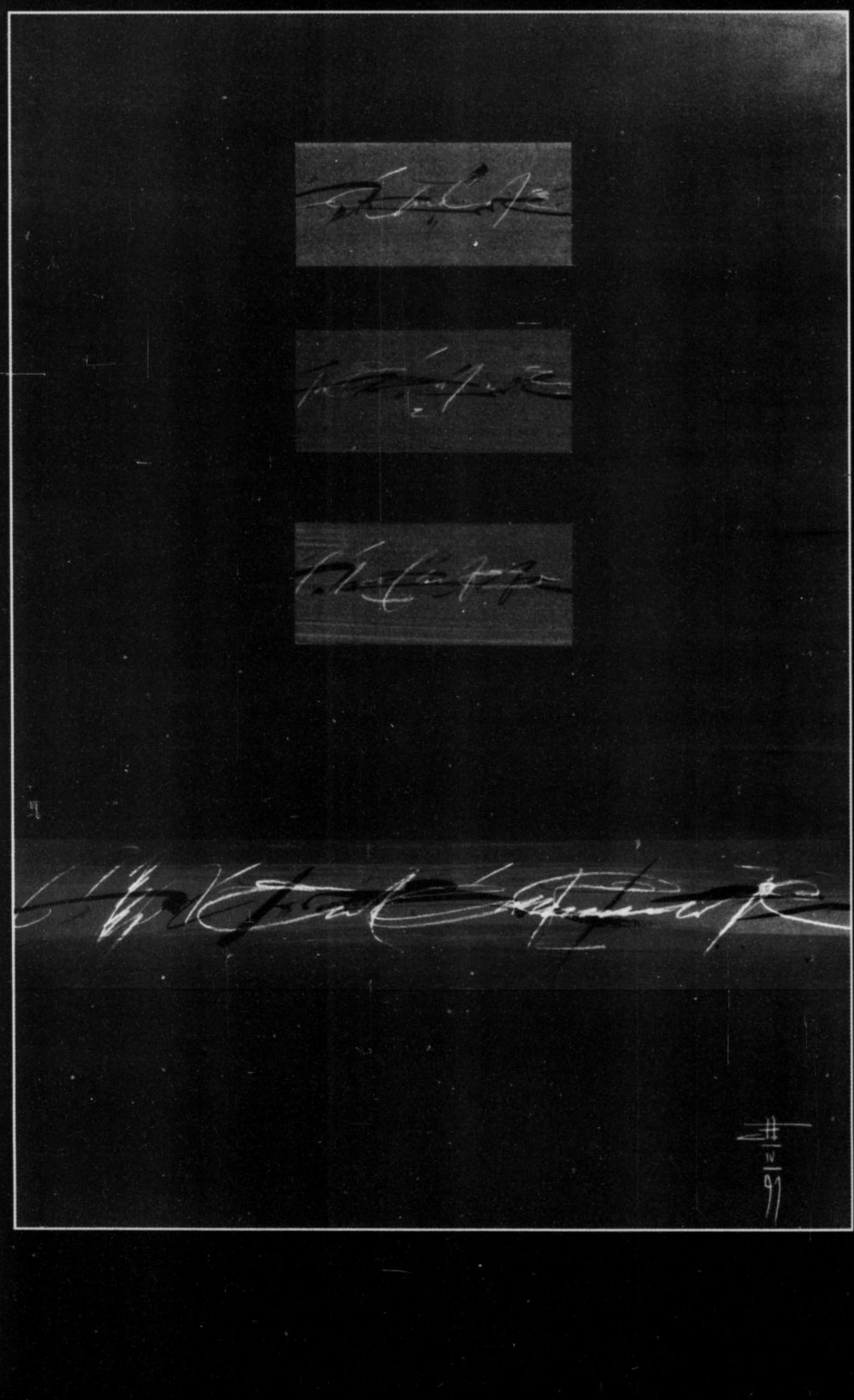

Dreams
1991, ink and paper
(50 x 70 cm)
by Claudine Dufour

After spending many years studying writing systems from all over the world, French artist Claudine Dufour began experimenting with signs and symbols. "I follow the watershed between painting and writing," she says, "and, stimulated and enriched by my discoveries, I mingle my signs with those of other cultures." She adds, "I create imaginary writing, a kind of parody, happy to feel like a musician, a choreographer and a calligrapher all in one."

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Month by month

For the *UNESCO Courier*, whose editorial goal it is to explore all activities and forms of expression with a universal dimension, the centenary of motion pictures is a golden opportunity. Cinema is, after all, an art that draws sustenance from all others, a protean medium of communication with inexhaustible resources, capable of accommodating the impulses of creators of very different kinds, of reaching popular audiences and of effortlessly crossing geographical and cultural frontiers.

For us this anniversary is an occasion to celebrate with an international tribute to the extraordinary galaxy of talented men and women who have shaped the first hundred years of cinema and have made possible the miracle of film—a unique, worldwide artistic adventure involving a vast number of personal aesthetic experiences and reflecting the culture of almost every country in the world.

At the same time it would have been impossible to ignore the tensions, the unresolved problems, the obstacles and threats that are also part of the story. Is the cinema an art or an industry? Can it be both at once? And if so, on what conditions? Where ruthless market forces prevail, is the American film industry bound to come out on top? Are its weapons purely economic? What chances does the cinema stand against today's television and tomorrow's multimedia?

These questions often arise in the following pages, but they do not overshadow the immense pleasure that the cinema has brought to all those of us who have lived in the twentieth century. All the gifted artists who have been kind enough to contribute to this issue bear witness to this, as do the photos we have selected from film libraries all over the world, a veritable family album from the world of cinema.

BAHGAT ELNADI AND ADEL RIFAAT

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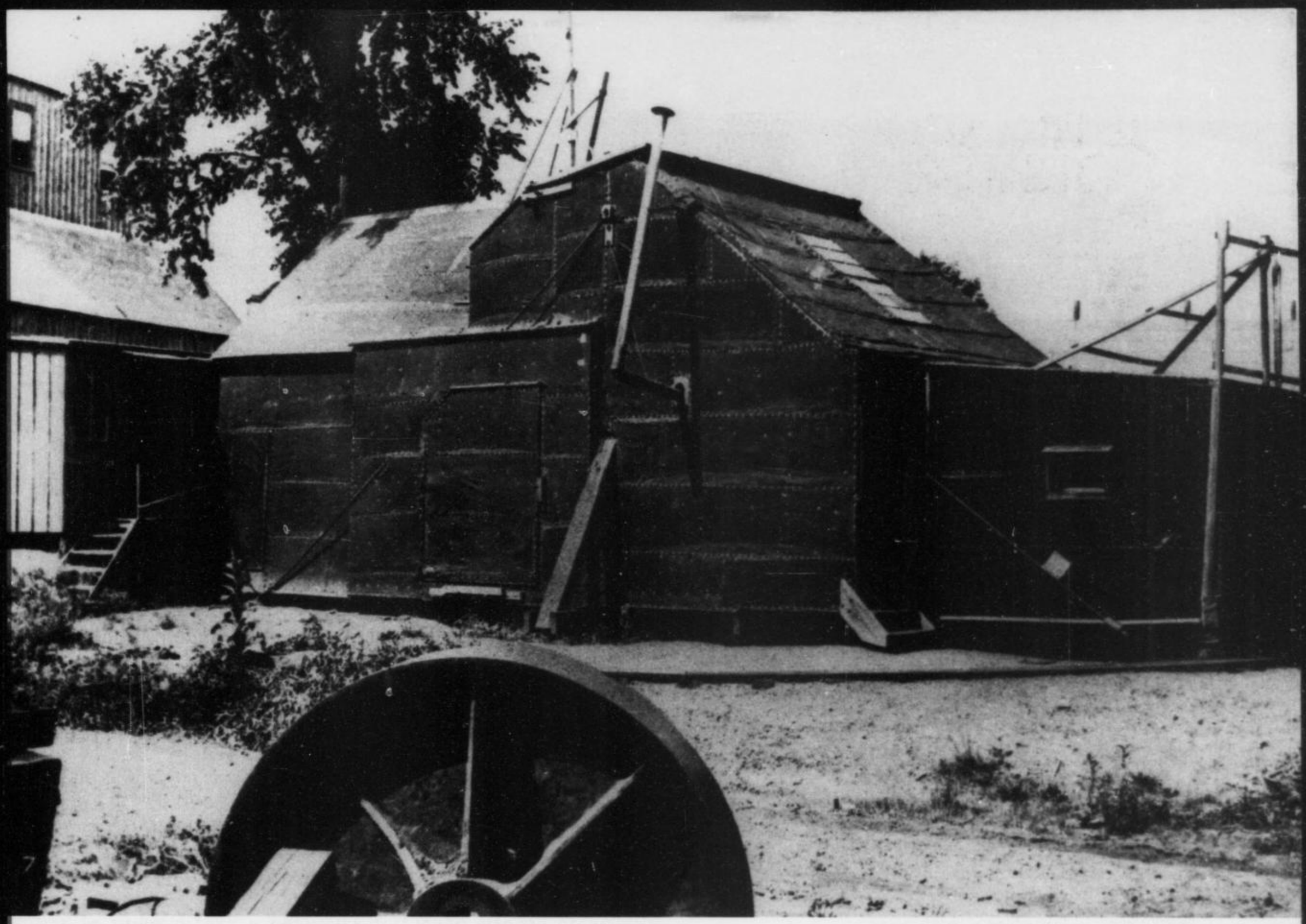


An art and an industry

by Peter Schepelern

Torn from the start between money-spinning and creativity, the cinema took a long time to win acceptance as an art in its own right

All through its first century, cinema has enjoyed an immense following, but it has also been feared and scorned. Both the educated bourgeoisie and the working-class public were excited by the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe shows in Paris and Edison's Kinetograph shows in New York at the end of the last century. Soon, however, the cultural establishment became concerned about

Above, "Black Maria", Thomas Edison's motion picture studio in West Orange, New Jersey (United States).

Toshiro Mifune (as Tajomaru, the bandit) and Machiko Kyo (Masago) in Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (Japan, 1950).

the enormous popularity of the new medium and began to dismiss it as a vulgar and even harmful symptom of modernity.

"Cinema materializes the worst popular ideal," wrote the French writer Anatole France (1844-1924). "It is not the end of the world, but it is the end of civilization." His opinion was echoed by his fellow Nobel Prize-winner, the German novelist Thomas Mann (1875-1955), who said: "It seems to me that film has very little to do with art". The French novelist Georges Duhamel (1884-1966) and many other critics saw film as a symptom of "Americanization", a vulgarization of the European spirit.

As recently as 1961, the American historian Daniel J. Boorstin wrote that "Even at its best, the movie remains a simplifying medium," and in the present decade, the outstanding film director Krzysztof Kieslowski has said, "The goal is to capture what lies within. But there's no way of filming it. Literature can do this, cinema can't. It can't because it doesn't have the means. It's not intelligent enough."

How far are these criticisms of cinema justified?

Stories from the dream factory

At the Lumière brothers' first public show in Paris on 28 December 1895, a short film was shown about a boy who teases a gardener. The naughty boy makes the gardener spray himself with water and eventually gets his deserved retribution. This early short, *L'arroseur arrosé*, marks what was to become the main attraction of film, its capacity to tell stories in a powerful and popular way.

The medium started out mainly as a form of expression based on imitation of theatre and painting, but gradually it developed a language and aesthetics of its own. A peak of cinematic story-telling was reached in 1915, with the great American director D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a monumental demonstration of the technical and stylistic possibilities of the new art form (although, with its racist depiction of the American Civil War, it also showed the medium's controversial potential).

In the 1920s, film developed in relative isolation from the other arts. While Marcel Proust and T.S. Eliot revolutionized litera-

ture, Picasso, Kandinsky and Duchamp showed new ways for painting, and Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Bartok broke up the tonal system of classical music, the cinema was mainly trying to establish techniques of logical storytelling rooted in Dickens' novels and nineteenth-century popular fiction and melodrama.

Avant-garde cinema did exist in the 1920s nonetheless. French experiments in Surrealism and Dadaism, German Expressionism and the Russian montage style were attempts to explore new approaches to cinema as an art. Films like Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* are considered as landmarks of cinema and are widely admired for their originality. But they had little influence on the mainstream of films.

Meanwhile Hollywood was building an enormous entertainment industry and, despite important European counter-currents such as French Poetic Realism in the 1930s and Italian neorealism in the 1940s, soon gained worldwide dominance. The period from the 1930s to the 1950s was the era of classical Hollywood storytelling, with the "star system", the "genre system" and the "studio system" as the main pillars of the dream factory.

Challenging the system The cinema, more than any other artistic medium, depends on acceptance by and money from the economic system, since the production costs of a film are so much higher than those of a book, a painting or a piece of music. As a result, the "system" has always had more influence over the cinema than over the other arts. The history of the cinema records a continuous tension between the inertia of the system, geared to seeking easy money, and film-makers seeking to fulfil their artistic ambitions. There is film as art, created by individualist geniuses who quixotically challenged the system, and there is film at the service of prevailing ideas and values.

The popularity and fascination of film have been used for art and entertainment, but abused for manipulation and falsification. Lenin called film "the most important

Peter Schepelern, of Denmark, is a professor in the Film and Media Studies Department at the University of Copenhagen. He has written several books on film theory and film history and contributed film criticism to various periodicals.

A still from the famous Odessa Steps sequence in Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (U.S.S.R., 1925).

Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (France, 1961) with Delphine Seyrig.

Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (United States, 1942). From left to right, Humphrey Bogart, Claude Rains, Paul Henreid and Ingrid Bergman.

of the arts" (1922), and during the 1930s film became a political instrument of propaganda in the hands of the totalitarian regimes—Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Spain. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* alone, in spite of its repugnant deification of Hitler, stands out as an original work of art. Hollywood answered back with films glorifying the democratic countries, their values, their courage and resistance.

New waves and complexities The first decisive breakthrough made by cinema into the established culture came after the Second World War, when a new generation of film-makers gave form and feeling to the post-war experience, perhaps more effectively than their colleagues in the older arts. Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief*, Federico Fellini's *La Strada*, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, Andrezj Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* and Satyajit Ray's *Apu* trilogy dealt movingly with the search for humanism in an era of doubt and shaken beliefs. This was cinema of great drama and high artistic quality, but it was still largely conventional and based on the premises of a literary culture.

In the 1960s film art broke new ground, but remained within the popular mainstream. The French New Wave films by the humanist François Truffaut, the misanthropic Claude Chabrol and the radical Jean-Luc Godard, and films such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, Federico Fellini's *8 1/2*, Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* were works that marked a new modernism. Unlike earlier avant-garde works, however, they were seen by a wide general public. Film had finally gained acceptance as an artistic medium.

Great films, contrary to other art forms, often transcend the conventional distinction between low and high culture. Virtuoso Hollywood pieces such as Ernst Lubitsch's erotic comedies, John Ford's westerns, Max Ophuls' melodramas and Alfred Hitchcock's thrillers contain no literary profundities, but seen as visual art, as examples of pictorial story-telling, they established a new concept of film culture. Reluctantly the bastions of high culture have come to realize that film as a medium has its own value. ■

A birthday or a funeral?

by Krzysztof Zanussi

Is the cinema still asking the eternal questions that sustain creative art?

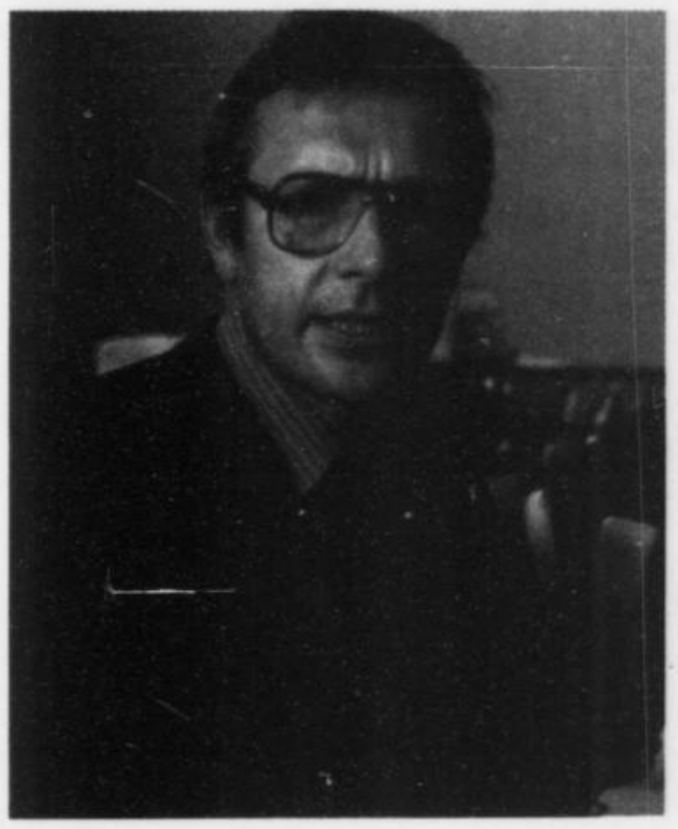
Unlike cinema, none of the traditional arts presided over by the nine muses of Antiquity owes its birth to an instrument or an invention. This explains why a doubt has hovered over cinema ever since its birth: is it really an art? The doubt stems not only from cinema's suspect relationship with a piece of machinery, but from its social and artistic origins.

Right from the start, the cinema recorded objective facts (as in the first films made by the Lumière brothers, "Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory" and "The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station") but it also told a story (as in the "The Gardener and the Cheeky Imp"[*L'arroseur arrosé*]). From the aesthetic point of view, the second aspect of cinema was already more advanced, or, as is usually said, more creative.

Fiction, whose origins are rooted in literature and whose visual expression is in theatre, has played a dominant role in the history of the cinema. But since the cinema remained silent for the first thirty years of its existence (a rather prolonged babyhood!), it would be more accurate to compare it to pantomime, which, like motion pictures, was often accompanied by music. So in the light of its genealogical tree, cinema might be described as literature without words, or as a form of theatre, but one far removed from literature, supported by music and provided with subtitles. With such origins it was difficult to find a place on Mount Parnassus.

Humble origins The cinema's social origins were even less glorious. It is a child of the fairground. Popular appeal is its birthright: it took root among the people at a time when the other muses were hobnobbing in salons. It cannot even be compared with other forms of popular art, with folklore, the memory of bygone days.

The cinema was born at the end of a century that saw an extraordinary artistic flowering and regarded art as its crowning glory.



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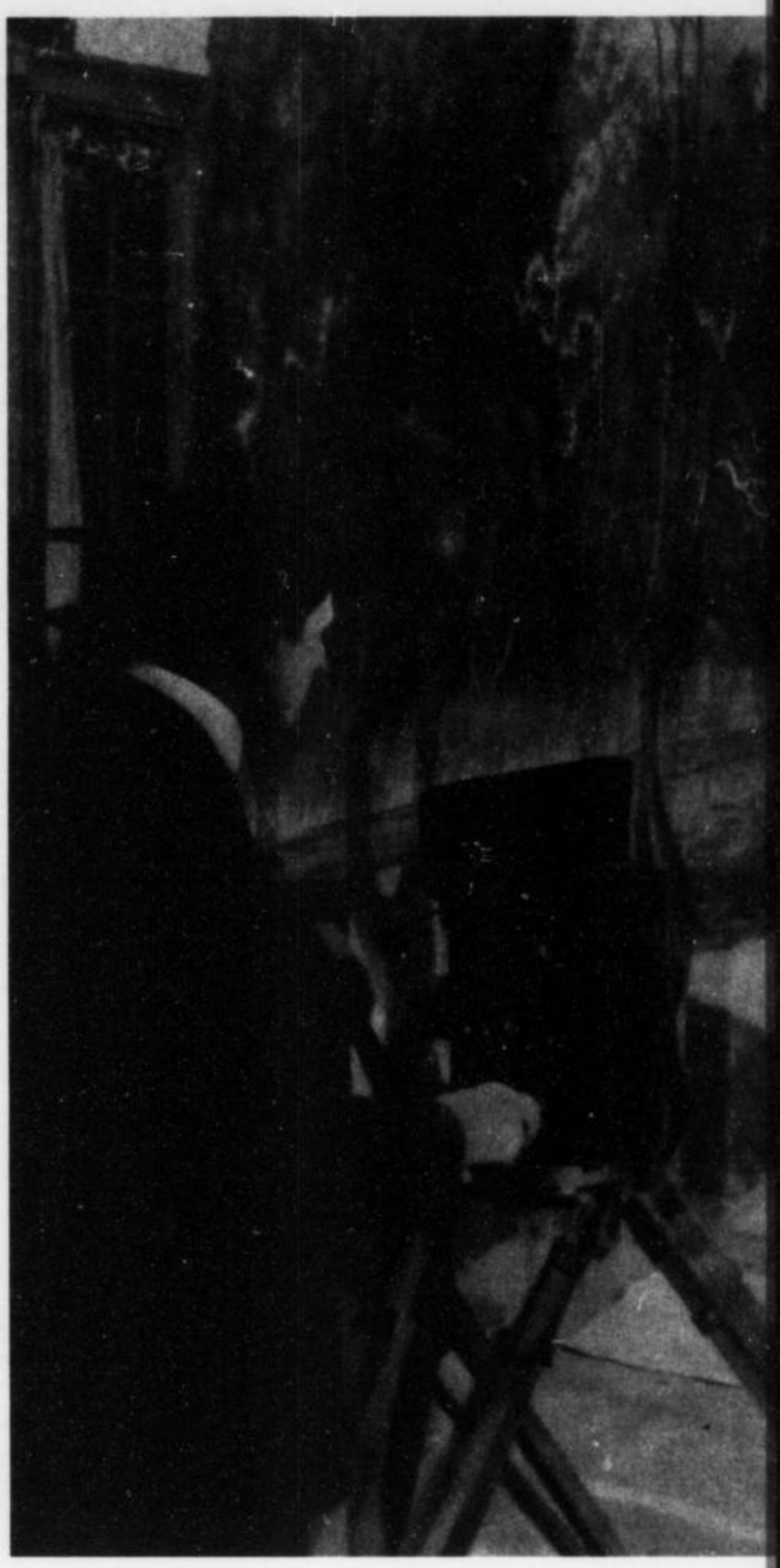
Krzysztof Zanussi is a Polish director and scriptwriter. Among his best-known films are *The Structure of Crystals* (1969), *Illumination* (1973) and *Dotkniecie* (*The Touch*, 1992) with Max von Sydow and Sarah Miles.

La Sortie des ouvriers de l'usine Lumière **("Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory"; France, 1895), one of Louis Lumière's first films.**



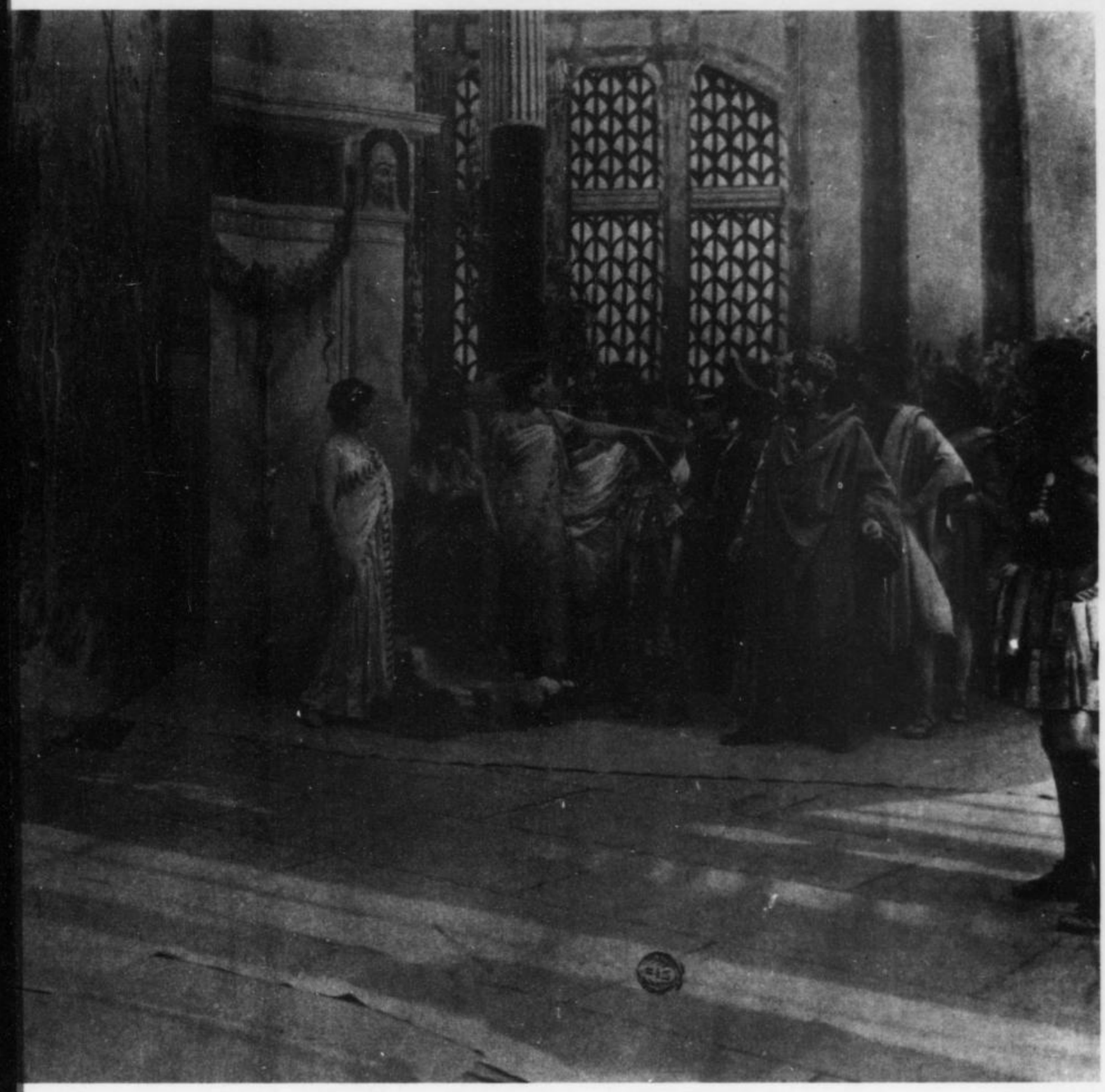
Artists have never been so highly regarded as they were in the nineteenth century. Never has such pride been felt in art which, in the eyes of the European elites of that time, was a testimony to human progress and evolution in its highest form. But those elites believed that the opera was the synthesis of all contemporary art forms. Great opera-houses were the temples of the late nineteenth century. The cinema could only appear to them as an insignificant novelty.

Running out of steam In point of fact, the birth of cinema was a turning point for the culture of our century. The age of Gutenberg was drawing to a close. We left behind the culture of the word for the culture of image and sound, and entered a new cultural era. By now we have put that turning point behind us. The modern world is inundated with audiovisual signs. Yet the cinema, which is responsible for this upheaval, seems to be in decline.

It is easy, but only half true, to say that by moving out of movie-houses and onto television and VCR screens films win ground for the cinema. While we can see that the output of the audiovisual sector is growing, we are less apt to notice the decline in its artistic potential, its aesthetic regression, the spiritual poverty of what it offers, and the increasing vapidity of the ideas expressed. One need only compare the cinema today with that of twenty years ago when year after year film-makers like Jean-Luc Godard, Andrei Tarkovski, Federico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman were opening up new aesthetic, moral and intellectual perspectives and taking part in an extraordinary blossoming of art that was comparable to the explosion of Renaissance Florence or Flemish oil painting.

The cinema is losing ground today in the same area as that where other art forms are in retreat. In the late twentieth century people no longer expect art to do what it has done for centuries. They no longer ask it to describe the world in terms of a clearly defined scale of values. They no longer expect answers because they no longer ask the questions that were once thought to be intrinsic to humanity, about the meaning of life, suffering and death, about the nature of love and happiness. Can art survive without these questions? I am convinced it cannot. And without them, can humanity itself survive?

As useless as Mozart Art has always been a diversion, a gratuitous, disinterested act. In the nineteenth century people sometimes said that a beautiful object was "useless, like Mozart." I have nothing against art as a diversion because it is through diversion and through disinterested, unproductive acts that thinking about life, happiness and death is expressed. In the past this kind of thinking was found in popular culture as well as among the elite. The difference lay in the language, not the message. The culture of ordinary people also asks the basic questions. A person who watches a mindless television film or an episode of *Dynasty* today is no



Le retour d'Ulysse ("The Return of Ulysses"; France, 1908), a film directed by Charles Le Bargy and featuring actors from the Comédie-Française theatre.

less educated than the film-goers of thirty years ago who would queue to see the latest Fellini or Bergman. So what has happened since then?

I attribute the decline of the cinema to a change in the role of culture. The language of moving pictures still has some strings to its bow, but the questions that could be discussed in this language have gone. Thus the centenary of the cinema is linked to its funeral.

But perhaps it is too early to bury the body. Perhaps the heart is still beating. Perhaps we are in too much of a hurry to bury a Europe that has so often experienced decline only to rise again and become a dynamic force in the evolution of humanity. Perhaps the eternal questions will again be asked in the world of new technologies and there will be a place where I could make a new *Illumination* (1978) or a new *Imperative* (1982). It does not really matter whether it is for television, a video cassette or a virtual-reality headset, just as it doesn't really matter who does the asking, myself or a film-maker several generations younger than me.

To my mind the only thing that counts is to know whether we will present these eternal questions or only an imagination-numbing "media mish-mash". ■

ET PHONOGRAPHE GEANT.
Souvenir de la Kermesse de Sedan, organisée au profit des Sinistrés de la Martinique (25 Mai 1902)
Suzaine-Pierson, éditeur, Sedan. - Cliché P. Lafolie

A cinema attraction at a fair in Sedan (France) in 1901.

Hollywood

by Tino Balio

How the major studios became a dream factory for America and the world

Hollywood did not become the motion picture capital of the United States until nearly twenty years after the invention of the new medium. Production was centred in the greater New York City area from 1894, when Thomas Edison introduced his Kinetoscope peepshow, until 1908, when American producers began migrating to southern California to take advantage of the temperate climate and the region's varied scenery to produce films year-round and supply nickelodeon theatres with westerns, comedies and other types of simple story films. The queues at the box-office were created mostly by immigrant workers and their families in search of cheap entertainment.

From these humble beginnings the movies soon became a national art form. Two innovations stimulated the transition: feature films and the star system. The growth of motion pictures from single reelers lasting fifteen minutes to features lasting ninety minutes and longer made it possible to tell complex and compelling stories that competed with the stage for the patronage of the more affluent middle-class. The creation of motion picture stars such as Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks created film fandom which enthusiastically endorsed the high salaries paid to these personalities by buying tickets that escalated in price.

Hollywood was one of several players in the world film market until the outbreak of the First World War, when indigenous film production in Europe came almost to a standstill. Rushing to fill the void, Hollywood underwent a period of rapid expansion, and film-making became a major industry. Producers sought market security by acquiring large chains of theatres; large chains of theatres sought a steady supply of films by acquiring studios. To finance these mergers, companies turned to Wall Street. The advent of the talkies in 1926 created even closer bonds with banking interests. Only the strongest film companies had the financial resources or connections to make the conversion to sound, with the result that by 1930 Hollywood emerged as a virtual oligopoly consisting of eight companies, most of which continue to dominate the business to this day.

The most powerful of the eight were the "Big Five": Loew's (MGM), Paramount, Warner Bros., Twentieth Century-Fox and RKO. These five companies were fully-integrated, meaning they produced nearly all the important motion pictures each year, operated worldwide distribution systems and owned the largest and best-situated theatres where their films were guaranteed a showing. Allied to the "Big Five" were the "Little Three": Universal, Columbia and United Artists. Universal and Columbia were producer-distributors that supplied the bigger companies with low-budget pictures for double features. United Artists was solely a distributor for a few quality independent producers. "Poverty Row" existed on the

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MGM cameramen film a speeding train.

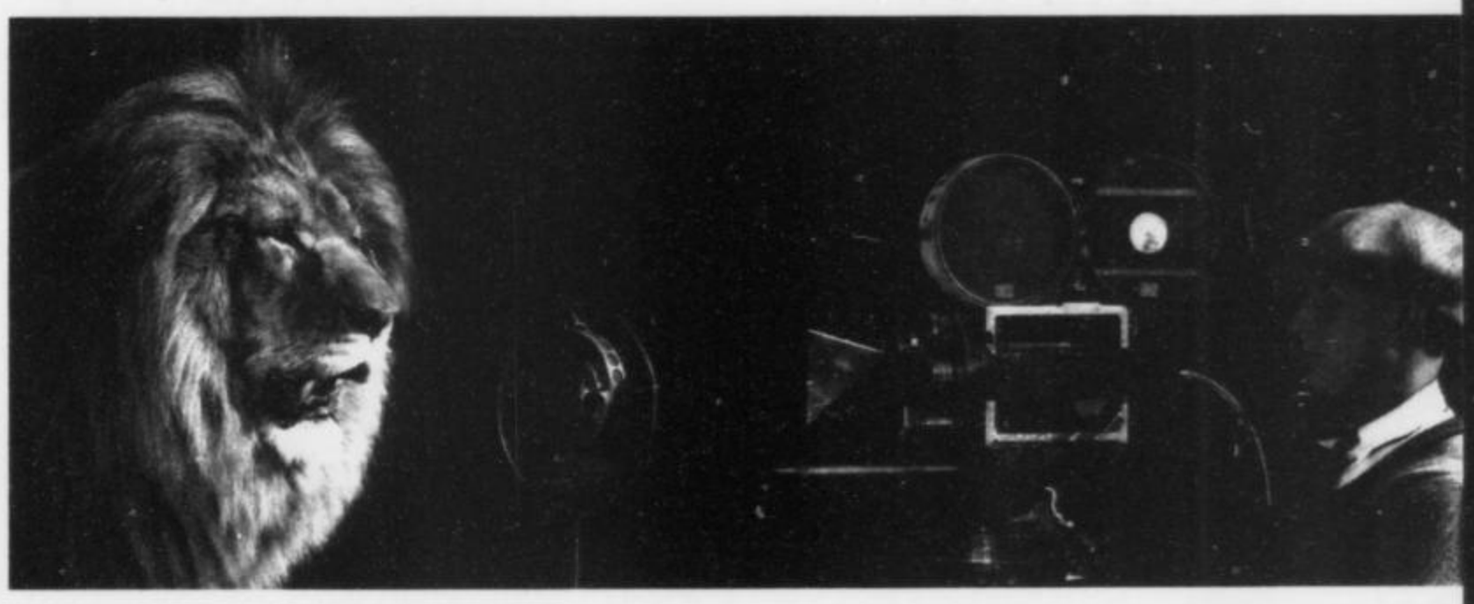
periphery. Small studios such as Monogram, Republic and Producers' Releasing Corporation served small towns and rural areas. As a group, they had a marginal impact on the business.

The studio system Hollywood reached the height of its influence during the 1930s and 1940s. After a brief decline during the Great Depression movie theatre attendance in the United States rose steadily until it reached nearly 80 million a week by 1946, a figure that nearly equalled the entire population of the country. To keep cinemas well stocked with films, Hollywood had perfected an efficient form of mass production called the studio system. Studios were organized by departments such as screenwriting, art direction, costumes, cinematography, editing and sound, all headed by a production chief who oversaw operations. The major studios turned out two types of pictures: class A, with name stars, big budgets and high production values, and class B, economy films to play the lower half of double bills. To maintain audience interest, studios produced an array of genres including musicals, screwball comedies, biographies, gangster films, westerns and melodramas. And to satisfy the concerns of motion picture censors, the industry adopted the Motion Picture Production Code in 1930, a form of self-regulation whereby producers voluntarily agreed to make their pictures simply with a generally-accepted code of behaviour.

After the Second World War, Hollywood experienced a series of upheavals that drastically changed its operations. In 1948 the U.S. Supreme Court charged the major companies with having violated antitrust laws and forced them to sell off their profitable motion picture theatres and to abolish restrictive trade practices. Soon after, the same companies were also hard hit by the rise of television, which caused box-office attendance to drop by 50 per cent during the 1950s. In Europe, the largest overseas market for American films, Hollywood encountered restrictive trade barriers as nations worked to rebuild their devastated economies and attempted to revive their flagging film industries. Hollywood responded to these conditions by producing fewer pictures and laying off redundant workers to reduce studio overheads by making widescreen blockbusters in colour to differentiate its product from television, by producing pictures abroad to take advantage of government subsidies, and by collaborating with television to participate in the growth of the new medium.

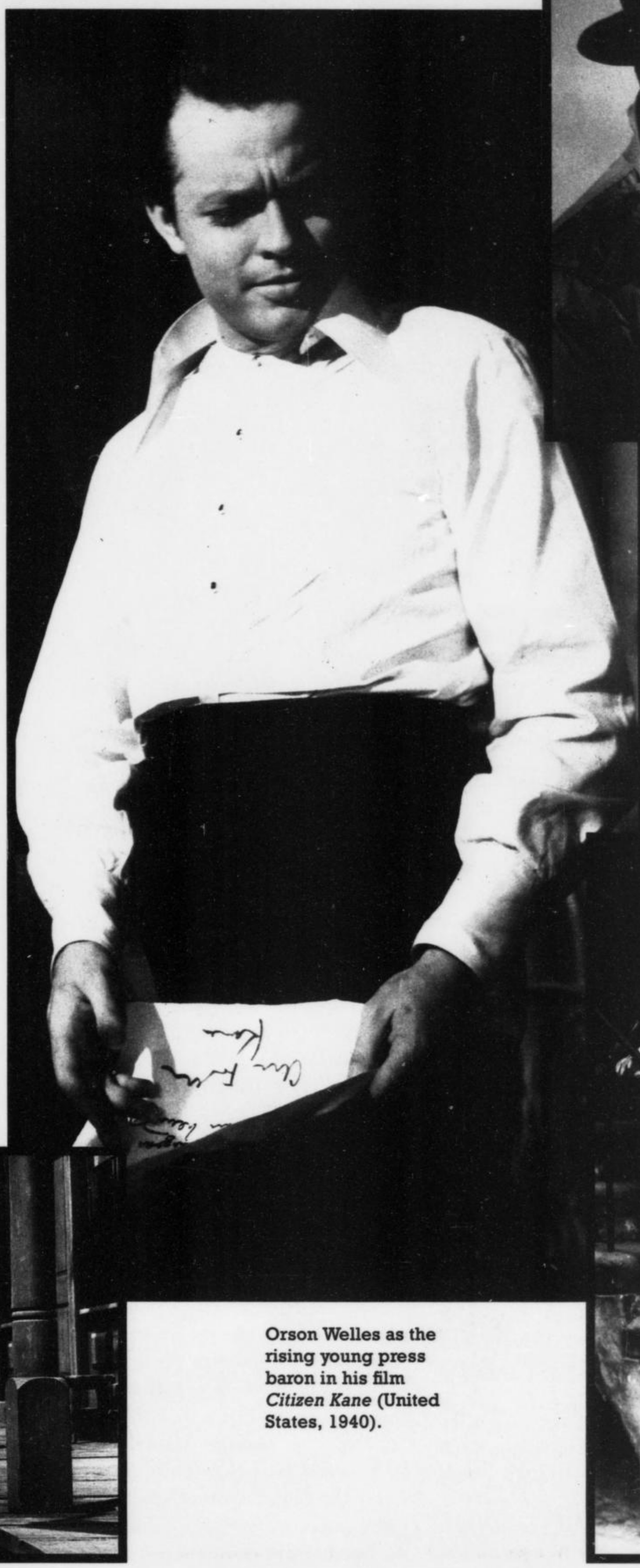
These measures revived Hollywood and prepared it to meet the arrival of new television distribution technologies such as cable television and home video in the 1970s and 1980s. The rising demand for entertainment of all kinds created by these technologies together with the commercialization of state-controlled broadcasting systems in Europe, the end of the Cold War and rising standards of living in emerging economies, made the film business truly international in scope. The major Hollywood companies have become huge entertainment conglomerates with interests in recorded music, television programming, book publishing and cable communications in all the principal world markets. Three studios—Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia Pictures and MCA—have foreign owners. Hollywood will remain the motion-picture capital of the world but will maintain this position only by strengthening alliances with foreign interests. ■

MGM films open with a shot of a roaring lion. Below, Leo recording his first roar for the screen (18 December 1928).



The legendary couple Clark Gable (Rhett Butler) and Vivien Leigh (Scarlett O'Hara) in Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (United States, 1939).

Gary Cooper as the frontier-town marshal in Fred Zinneman's *High Noon* (United States, 1952).



Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (United States, 1942).

Charles Chaplin's *City Lights* (United States, 1930), starring Chaplin and Virginia Cherrill as the blind flower girl.

Orson Welles as the rising young press baron in his film *Citizen Kane* (United States, 1940).

Singin' in the Rain (United States, 1952), a classic musical directed by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly.

Perchance to dream...

by Lionel Steketee

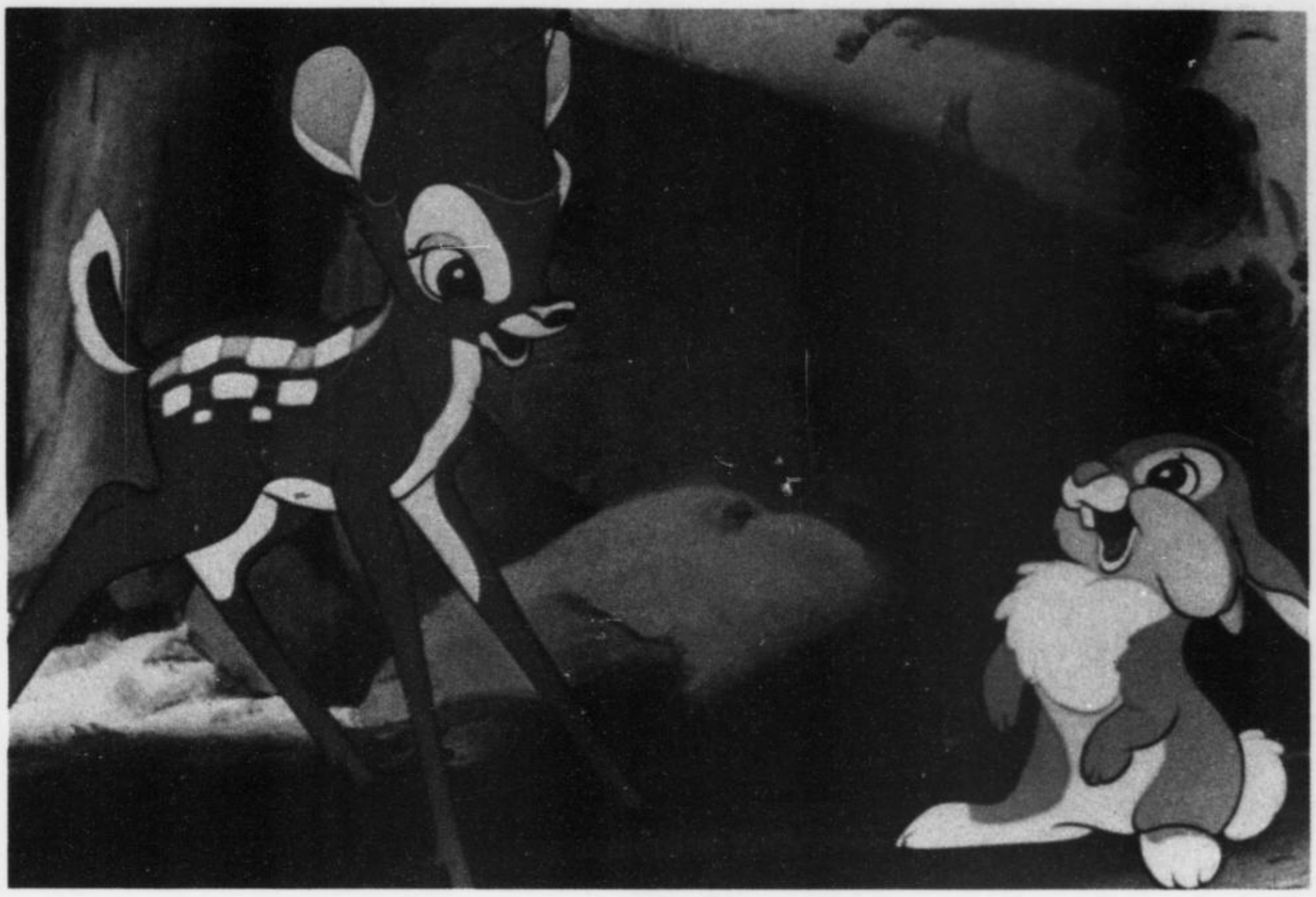
Economic muscle is not the only explanation for the power of the American cinema

Is cinema an art or a commodity? Is it culture or commerce? The big American studios made their choice long ago: cinema is an industry, and every film is a product. But things are not quite as simple as that.

How is it that American cinema can make people all over the world dream, laugh and cry, and has done so for the last hundred years?

As early as 1916, when Europe was embroiled in war, D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* laid the foundations of a new means of communication that, in addition to its artistic qualities, would vehicle not only a message meant for a universal audience but also the image of an entire country. Wittingly or unwittingly, the American film industry has always been the instrument of a certain kind of propaganda on behalf of values specific to the United States. Without it, people in America and elsewhere would clearly be less aware of the American myth.

But this desire to propagate a way of life is not enough to explain the impact of the American cinema. Its openness has also played a role. It has always welcomed non-American creators with open arms. Charlie Chaplin, Frank Capra, Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder and Elia Kazan of the older generation, and George Miller (*Mad Max*, 1979), Peter Weir (*The Dead Poets' Society*, 1989) and Ridley Scott (*Thelma and Louise*, 1990) today, all have one thing in common: the universality of their language. It is pre-



Bambi (United States, 1941-1942), a Walt Disney-produced feature-length cartoon. A pioneer in the field, Disney was the world's undisputed cartoon king for many years.

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Lionel Steketee, who was born in France of American parents, is a director, translator and scriptwriter. He has directed a documentary on contemporary music in New York.

cisely because they were foreigners that they had to, and did, use the camera to tell stories that all kinds of audience, irrespective of frontiers and languages, could understand.

One of the keys to this language, and thus to the American cinema, is the explicit use of emotion. "The most important thing is to move the audience," said Alfred Hitchcock, who is, nevertheless, one of the seventh art's "coldest" directors. In classics like Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) and a recent production like Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1993), American film-makers make audiences laugh and cry by getting them to identify with the characters, whether they are larger than life or just ordinary people. What counts is getting people to fantasize and have fun, and putting us back in touch with the lost simplicity of childhood. "Adulthood leads to the loss of dream and adventure, the gradual numbness of imagination and freedom," says Steven Spielberg.

This very American idea of getting people to dream by means of cinema has a long history. As early as 1909 the American sociologist Jane Adams dubbed the cinema a "house of dreams" and wrote, "By going to the movies, today's young people living in industrial towns can satisfy their needs for a richer existence than that the world offers them at present." This desire to induce people to dream and to give them models to identify with led to the creation of thrillers, westerns and musical comedies, all typically American genres.

Yet the American cinema provides something more than dreams and entertainment, even if its watchword was summed up by Frank Capra when he said, "There are no rules when it comes to film creation, only sins. And the most deadly is boredom." Hollywood has produced many films attacking the "American model", and has on occasion indulged in ruthless self-criticism (Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All about Eve*, for example). In the wealth and diversity of American cinema everyone can find enjoyment as well as the expression of their anxieties. ■

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (United States, 1979), an epic rendering of the Viet Nam War.

Czech-born American director Miloš Forman has won American Academy Awards (Oscars) for Best Film with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Amadeus* (1984). Left, directing Tom Hulce (Mozart) in *Amadeus*.

Miloš Forman

Interview

Tell us about your first contact with the cinema.

— It was unforgettable. One Saturday night, when I was four or five years old, my parents took me to see a film in Caslav, the city where I was born in the country that was then called Czechoslovakia. I found out later that it was a documentary about Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*. Oddly enough, it was a silent film. On the screen gigantic people opened enormous mouths from which no sound emerged. But the audience knew the opera by heart and began to sing louder and louder. The women were in tears. It was an extraordinary introduction to the cinema!

Some time later I saw *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which I thought was wonderful. I thought that I had seen the most beautiful thing in the world, and I fell in love with Snow White. In a store I had bought coloured cakes of soap shaped like the seven dwarfs, and each day I used a different one. When I saw the film, I stopped using these pieces of soap so that they would last longer.

How did you get started in theatre, in directing?

— During the war my brother Pavel, who was being hunted by the Gestapo, joined a troupe that staged operettas. He designed the stage sets. It was thanks to him that I saw my first play, which struck a deep emotional chord. He also took me backstage. That was extremely disconcerting: the young women undressing before my eyes, the jokes, the music, the smell of starch and mothballs and sweat. It was a revelation to me and I decided there and then that the theatre, this other world, would be my life.

Looking around me, I gradually discovered that there is often a difference between what people think and

Above, Jack Nicholson gets a lift from Will Sampson in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

what they do. I learned to decipher their feelings when they often couldn't do so themselves. It's the same with fictional characters. There's always a mask that needs to be removed, and essentially this is what a stage or film director does.

When you went backstage, did you already know that you wanted to become a stage director?

— No, I had no idea at that time. I vaguely thought that maybe I would become an actor or even a playwright. I was very young. I remember very clearly, towards the end of the war, when the German authorities decided to close all the theatres and movie houses in Bohemia. Everybody was in tears, on stage and in the audience. The conductor silenced the orchestra. I thought that the world which I had just entered was disappearing forever.

Later on you went to film school?

— Yes, in Prague. I studied screenplay writing and film technique. Milan Kundera was one of my teachers. He was already known as a poet. He was not much older than we were, and the female students adored him. He made me read *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, which I made into a film many years later. I wrote hundreds of pages, analysing films and screenplays. And, of course, we saw films.

Which ones?

— We saw all the films we could. Today, when I try to remember which ones had the biggest effect on me back then—during those decisive, formative years when choices are made—I would put Charlie Chaplin first. I admired and loved his work enormously. Next I would mention Italian neorealist films, the work of Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio De Sica, especially *Miracle in Milan* and *The Bicycle Thief*. I liked their blend of fun and feeling. In a word, I liked their humanity.

After film school, you went into television. By then, the communist regime was firmly established in Czechoslovakia. Were you a victim of censorship?

— During the whole of the first part of my life, in the theatre, in films, or in television—where, by the way, I presented films—everything I did meant waging, as resourcefully as possible, an endless struggle against censorship, which was ubiquitous. The need to struggle, to be cunning day in day out, made me realize very early on that film plays a social role, that it is a certain way of looking at the world, and that it can even help to change the world, even if only to a slight extent.

Every actor who appeared on television first had to fill in a form in which he wrote out his lines, which were then submitted to the censor "up there", as we used to say. One day, I wanted to present two jugglers on a variety show. I was asked to report to the censor what they were going to say. Of course they weren't going to say anything. I tried to explain this but it was no good. So I advised the jugglers to fill in their forms anyway, which they did. They wrote down something like: "Hey! Ho! Hop! Hop! Yup! Ah!" The form came back with the official stamp of approval. The dialogue had been accepted "up there".

There is something else that I'll never forget. Under communism, in principle, all society's problems were solved. Consequently, any conflict between good and evil—in a contemporary context, at any rate—became impossible. How could drama even exist in such a situation? You can't imagine the endless discussions that were held to solve this problem which today seems ridiculous.

Was it ever solved?

— Yes. The great minds of the Party found a solution. Conflicts should be between "the good and the best".

Even since your first film, the documentary *Talent Competition*, you have stayed very close to reality.

— Yes. I have always been fascinated

A scene from Miloš Forman's *The Firemen's Ball* (Czechoslovakia, 1967), a satire on life in a small Czech town.

Hana Breechova (right) as Angela, the factory worker, in Miloš Forman's *A Blonde in Love* (Czechoslovakia, 1965).

by what is called "reality". I wanted — and still do—my films to seem *real*. But when a camera is filming, it always distorts the reality it seeks to record and people stop acting naturally. This is something that cannot be helped. Ironically, it was my interest in reality that led me to fiction. There, at least, I can create—my way—another kind of truth.

◗ But you also want to tell a story.

— I've always wanted to tell stories. Telling a story, I think, is a way of approaching—even, perhaps, understanding—life. And storytelling, with all its surprises, is also a source of pleasure.

◗ In 1968, when Warsaw Pact troops invaded Prague, you decided to go and work in the United States. Unusually, you made a fresh start in another country and in another language. You have won two Academy Awards, one for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and another for *Amadeus*. What is your secret?

— There is no secret. Adapting to a new life in the United States was a matter of survival. I had no choice. I took advantage of an opportunity that the French film director Claude Berri gave me, and made *Taking Off* in New York in 1969. But that film was not successful in the United States. Probably it was too idiosyncratic. For a few years I had a hard time and then suddenly had a success with *Cuckoo*.

No, I don't have a secret. Other film-makers who had come from Europe, especially Central Europe, people like Ernst Lubitsch, Billy Wilder and Fritz Lang, also made a new life for themselves in the United States. Of course I had to change the way I worked and even the kind of stories I tell. Until I could walk into a bar and understand everything people were saying, I couldn't hope to make movies in America that were close to reality, movies like *Black Peter* and *A Blonde in Love*. I wasn't really at home, even if I was now carrying an American passport.

◗ Did you return to Czechoslovakia?

— I went back as soon as I could, in 1979, and my first official reception was held at the American embassy. After that, I made *Amadeus* there. Now I often go back. My two sons live and work in Prague. Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, is an old friend.

◗ But you have no plans to make a Czech film?

— Some day, perhaps. Why not? But I would have to change the way I work again and get used to my country—which has changed considerably—all over again.

◗ Do you feel at home in the United States now?

— I have always felt at home in places where I could work in peace. I felt at home wherever I had a roof over my head and could put down my suitcase. In recent years it has been easier for me to make films in the United States than in Central Europe, and I had a good roof over my head in Connecticut. How could I possibly not feel at home?

But maybe one day the forces that took me far from the land of my childhood will bring me back again. Who knows?

◗ Do you think the cinema has a future?

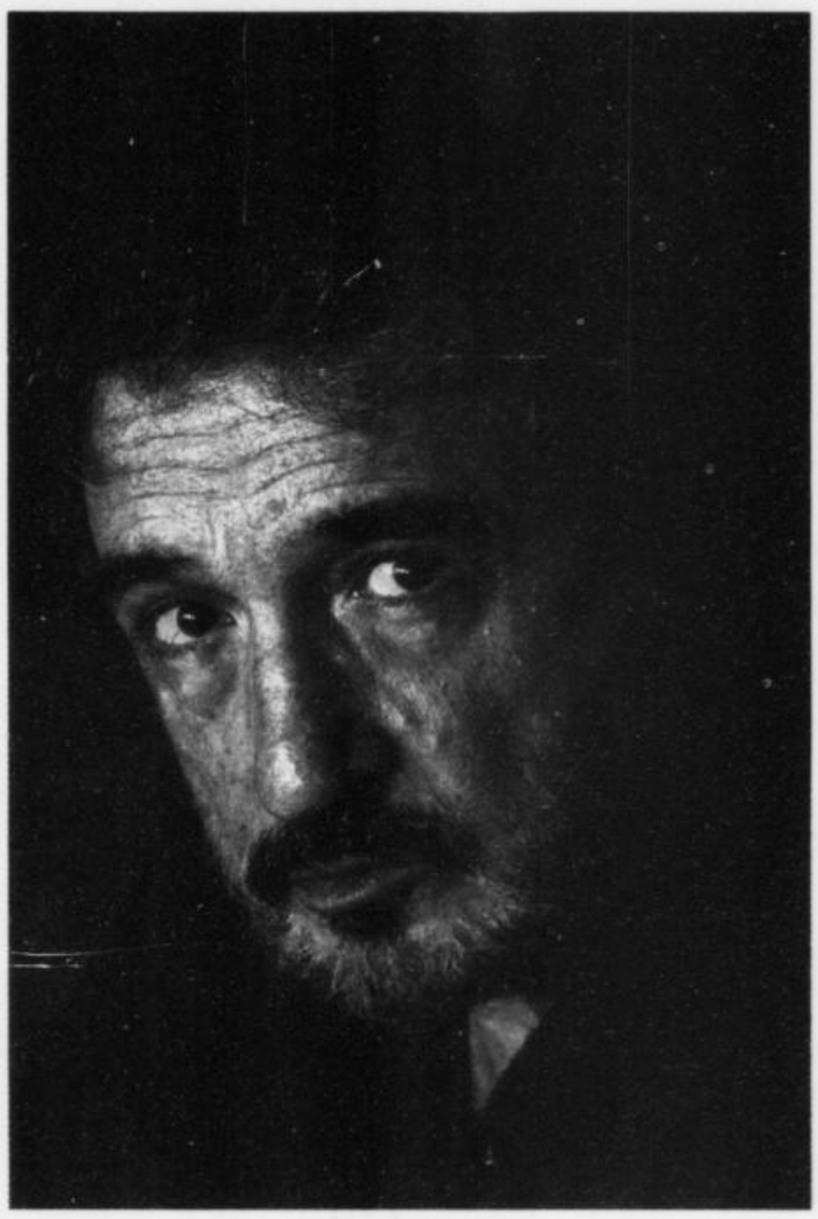
— As far as I am concerned, yes. Five years after *Valmont*, I am almost certainly going to make a new film. We're supposed to start shooting at the beginning of next year.

◗ And the cinema in general?

— Yes. Films will go on being made. There's no doubt about that. What sort of films? That's the big question. The answer is in the hands of the people who will be making them. ■

Methuselah or Peter Pan?

by Jean-Claude Carrière



Is the cinema young or old? asks a leading French scriptwriter in a forceful article on the dilemmas facing the seventh art, including the tensions between America and Europe over the liberalization of trade in audiovisual products.

It is very hard for us not to realize we are 100 years old, for everyone keeps on telling us so: the cinema is about to clock up the first century of its existence.

Is the cinema young or old? Has it, within a mere century, come full circle? Is it not beginning to repeat itself, to show signs of senility and approaching death? Could this first century also be its last?

It is certainly true that the language of film has evolved incredibly fast. The gulf that separates a monologue in Racine from a Surrealist poem, or a Giotto from a Kandinsky, was bridged by the cinema in less than fifty years. It is an art in a hurry and ever on the move, a form of expression that is constantly being manhandled and mauled. This sometimes leads film-makers to regard straightforward shifts of syntax, or state-of-the-art equipment, or satellite broadcasting, or so-called "new" images, as profound or even revolutionary changes. That great inventiveness, which has been a characteristic of the cinema since its very beginnings, tends to generate a state of exhilaration in practitioners of film, which encourages them to confuse, not for the first time, technique with thought, technique

Pierre Brasseur, Arletty and Jean-Louis Barrault in *The Children of Paradise* (France, 1943-1944), directed by Marcel Carné and written by Jacques Prévert.

with emotion, technique with knowledge. *Signs* of change are mistakenly identified with the deeper substance of film. The wonderful proliferation of images that dog us wherever we go only aggravates this feeling of intoxication. Struck dumb by each new marvel of technology, we obstinately overlook the most fundamental thing of all: the true and singular meaning of what we see. Yet what we see is a repetition of the same familiar patterns in different technological disguises. We talk of eternal youth and renewal, and we applaud. This explains our sense of utter confusion, our feeling that everything we thought we knew is constantly being called into question. It explains our permanent state of feverish dissatisfaction, our almost unhealthy need to switch from one form to another—and to regard that process as real change.

It also explains our weariness, which arises from the repetition of an illusion. We know full well that at a time when we are swamped by images it is increasingly difficult to create an image—a truly dense and radiant image which our brain immediately locks into and never abandons.

So is the cinema old? In its 100 years of existence, it would seem to have gone through every conceivable phase: primitive, classical and baroque periods, followed by a renaissance (also known as the "New Wave"), a Surrealist, symbolic and even abstract period, all jumbled together and overlapping each other without any chronological rhyme or reason. The result today is that filmmakers seem to have lost their productive ambition and are resigned to working in an often conventional narrative form or producing remakes of the same old stories.

Amazing maturity There was a time, thirty or forty years ago, when the cinema vowed it would swallow up all other

forms of expression, from architecture and painting to music, drama and, of course, literature. It was hailed as the complete art, the art we had been waiting for since the beginning of History, the art of the twentieth century and the centuries after it.

Naturally, the dream fizzled out. Literature is not dead, nor is painting; and the theatre all over the world seems more thriving than ever. Film has had to resign itself to being nothing but film—which is already quite an achievement. And the technical exploits which brought it such loudly proclaimed glory are now a nuisance and even a hindrance.

Sooner or later we may enter the universe of virtual images and be able, in our drawing rooms, to act out scenes with utterly submissive creatures that are the spitting image of Marilyn Monroe or Napoleon. But that day is still several decades away, and in the meantime the cinema remains an image limited by a frame and projected onto a flat screen, either large or small. That projection has to obey a certain pace and send out a precise number of frames per second, otherwise the film being shown becomes an incomprehensible mishmash of images or else, on the contrary, slows down and stops.

Paradoxically, then, what was once the very strength of the cinema may today be its weakness. Film is a technical exploit, but an exploit limited by the technique itself. It is far from certain that we shall succeed in extricating ourselves from that contradiction.

The cinema has also aged in another, even more alarming way: it has lost its inventive, investigative streak, selling its soul to commercial forces and giving up the notion of original expression. As a result, a great debate continues regularly to pit American distributors against European film-makers. Let us examine that issue in a little more detail.

Two traditions The American cinema, or rather the American sound image as conveyed by both cinema and television, seems to be spreading into every corner of the world, rapidly destroying all local production. This conquest is in fact a reconquest. At the beginning of the 1920s, Hollywood enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the manufacture of moving pictures—about 80 per cent of world production. That percentage fell during the decades that followed, as a result of the rise of national film industries and the advent of the Second World War, which cut off many countries from the American distribution network.

Ever since 1945, a clearly defined and fully avowed process of reconquest has been underway. The bosses of this industry regard film as a commodity that is in no way cultural in nature. The American distributors' firm and sincere message to us is: the cinema is our patch—why don't you go and manufacture something else?

Rather than spend time on the superficial slanging match in which the Americans are regularly described as "imperialists" and the French as "chauvinists", it is important to remember, I think, that our two opposing stances, which were brought into confrontation during the GATT[1] negotiations, are the product of two parallel traditions.

The older of those traditions is Anglo-American and goes back to an eighteenth-century statute on copyright passed in England during the reign of Queen Anne. This statute enabled printers to buy a work from an author and do what they wished with it. In the last three centuries that tradition has been kept alive—although it has had a bumpy ride—in northern Europe and, at a later date, in the United States.

Another tradition, which began with Beaumarchais in France in the eighteenth century, holds on the contrary that the person who writes a work is its actual author and has financial and moral rights to it. That view, which was vigorously promoted by Victor Hugo, gained currency and resulted, at the end of the nineteenth century, in the Bern Convention, to which nearly 100 states throughout the world now adhere.

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Jean-Claude Carrière, French writer, playwright and scriptwriter, is President of FEMIS, a Paris cinema and audiovisual school.

Erich von Stroheim (centre) with (from his left) Pierre Fresnay and Jean Gabin in Jean Renoir's *The Great Illusion* (France, 1937), the story of a group of Frenchmen in a German prisoner-of-war camp during the First World War.

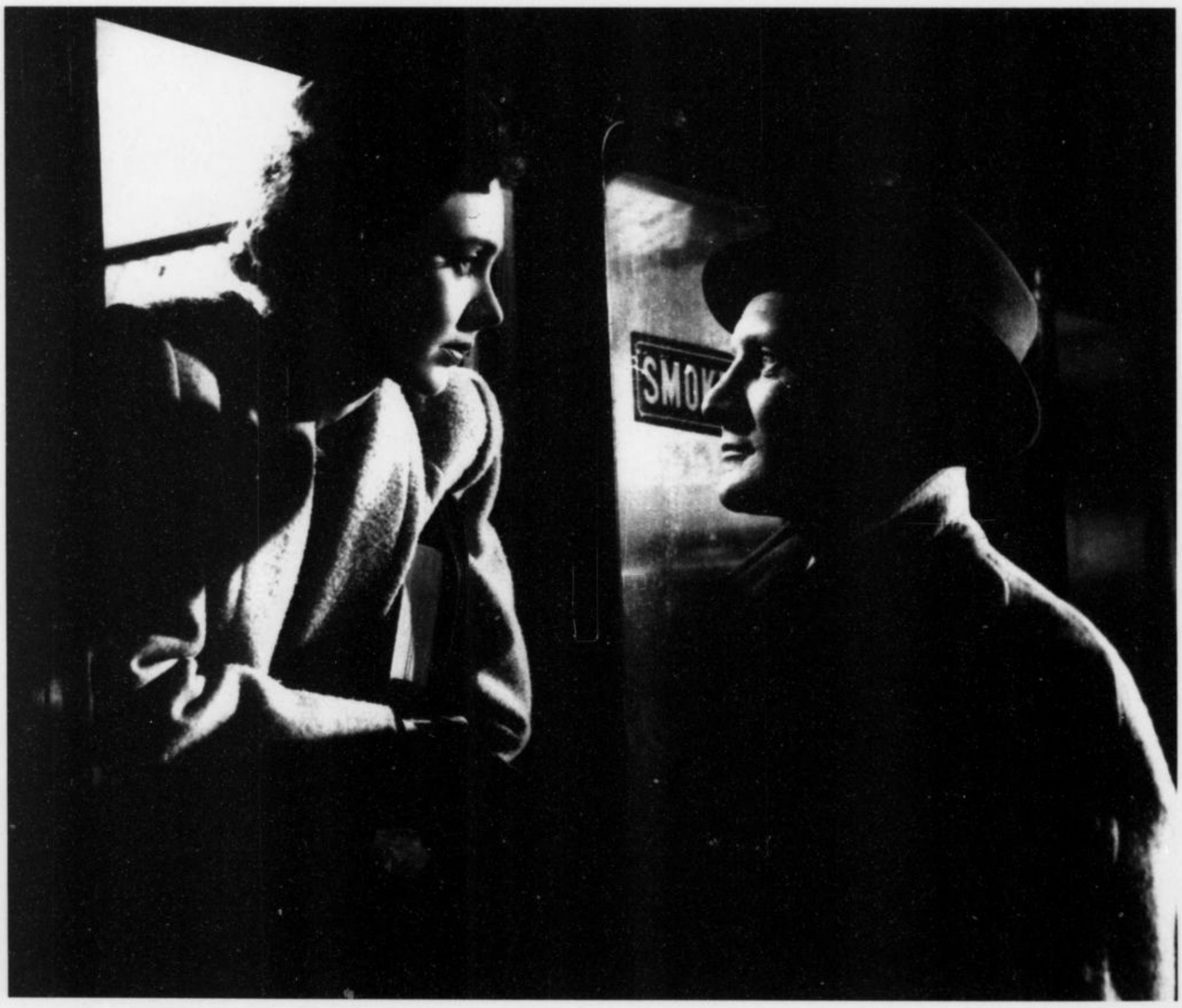
This radical difference between two conceptions explains why the American cinema, never regarded as an art, has been very much the work of producers. In Europe, on the other hand, and especially in France, the notion has grown up that the cinema is a means of expression and even an art in its own right. For this reason, the author or authors of a film, by virtue of the fact that they enjoy rights to their works as a result of the Bern Convention, regard themselves as artists on a par with painters or writers.

The immediate upshot of all this has been that if the cinema is an art it should be connected with the Culture Ministry and be helped and even protected. This help has taken various forms in France since 1947, but consists mainly of a tax on cinema takings, which finds its way back into the hands of producers when they produce a new film.

In Luis Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (France, 1972), written by Jean-Claude Carrière, the colonel's guests discover they are on stage before a theatre audience.

A dangerous misunderstanding The various debates that pitted the French against the Americans during the GATT talks have not affected our longstanding and unshakable admiration for the great American cinema. Film seems to have been etched into the very substance of America. It is hard to imagine one without the other. The disagreement is in fact based on a misunderstanding. Once that is realized, it becomes clear that our two traditions, which have always existed alongside each other, and very often harmoniously, cannot possibly merge into a single tradition.

Neither of the two can be wiped out by the other. They have to go on coexisting. Any monopoly of images in the world of



Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard in *Brief Encounter* (United Kingdom, 1945), directed by David Lean.

the near future would be unfair for some and dangerous for everyone.

The argument one most often hears is that of "free competition". The trouble is that these two words do not mean the same thing everywhere. It is obviously absurd to claim, for instance, that Mali and California are "free" to compete with each other. As someone put it, it is a case of "a free fox in a free henhouse".

A straightforward trade clause in a treaty could well result in the demise of a means of expression—something which even the most ferociously dictatorial measures have never been able to achieve in the history of the world. And that has already occurred in many countries. Producers and authors have not always spotted the danger. They have preferred to throw in the sponge on the pretext of "allowing a free play of market forces". And the fox got in through the main door, bringing with him basketfuls not only of sounds and pictures, but of various products represented and often extolled by those sounds and pictures, such as clothes, drinks, cars, cigarettes and even the ordinary things of daily life. We now know that no image is innocent. An image is much more than an image.

A vital language Thus, at a deeper level, the question we have to ask ourselves is: is the filmed image necessary for a people? Is this way of telling ourselves our own stories, of holding a mirror up to our own faces with today's techniques, a simple pleasure of life or a vital necessity?

I would answer that it is a vital necessity. American distributors would argue the contrary: it does not matter, they would say, that the Africans, the Brazilians or even the Europeans can no longer make films. We'll make them for them.

African television viewers already have no choice: they are given a forced diet of foreign-made police series and sentimental soaps that never address their own concerns.

And the same lurking danger threatens Europe. The French production system, which is possibly the most sophisticated in the world in that it allows public subsidies to be used along with private money, is Europe's last bastion of resistance against the American invasion. If it were to be swept away, not only would the death knell be sounded for the French cinema, but we could kiss goodbye to the last remnants of a European cinema—Wim Wenders, Andrzej Wajda, Pedro Almodovar, Theodoros Angelopoulos and many others—and indeed to the last surviving examples of ambitious, individual and experimental filmmakers in the world, whose films are always co-produced according to the French system—Akira Kurosawa, Nikita Mikhalkov, Zhang Yimou and Souleymane Cissé.

Theo Angelopoulos's *The Suspended Step of the Stork* (France, Greece, Italy and Switzerland, 1991) features Marcello Mastroianni and Jeanne Moreau in the story of a reporter who recognizes a writer who has supposedly disappeared.

By sticking up for ourselves we are sticking up for others. It has nothing to do with chauvinism. On the contrary, the aim is to defend a "different cinema" wherever it emerges in the world. Two radically different conceptions have clashed. The two countries which invented the cinema, the United States and France, are confronting each other once again. This is no doubt a great pity, particularly as this trade war is one-way. No one in Europe wants to see the American cinema disappear. It would be absurd and unreal. The American cinema has long been very widely shown on French screens, and I only hope that this continues to be the case. French films, on the other hand, are virtually nowhere to be seen in the United States.

So, when it comes down to it, is the cinema young or old? The answer can be provided only by those who will work in the cinema of the future. There is no way that it can disappear as a product. But as a means of expression, a form of artistic experimentation or a way of looking at the world—and not as "entertainment", which makes us turn away from the world—it is indisputably under threat.

Even so, let's lay our bets on the younger generation, on the indomitable forces that are ours, on the obscure, startling and breathless leap from one century to the next. ■

1 GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. A set of international agreements (now superseded by the World Trade Organization) concerning some 140 countries and aimed at the liberalization of world trade. An agreement reached between the United States and the European Union on 14 December 1993 maintains protection for the European audiovisual industry in the name of what has been called the "cultural exception". (Ed.)

interview

Jean-Paul Rappeneau

When did you first become a film-goer?

— It was just before the Second World War. I enjoyed Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* directed by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley. I saw them in Auxerre, the town where I was born, in the Grand Casino, which was also used for stage plays. And the theatre was my first great love.

At the end of the war American films poured into Europe, and like every other teenager I raced to see them. We started a film club in Auxerre, and I was one of the organizers. That's where I really started to learn about the cinema and love films.

I remember Eisenstein's *The General Line* and *The Battleship Potemkin* and Pudovkin's *Mother*. When I was fifteen, in 1947, I was stunned by Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. I saw that you could use all kinds of theatrical devices in the cinema but go so much farther than the theatre. It was a turning point in my life. The supreme art for me ceased to be the theatre and became the cinema.

I thought of nothing else but making films. I talked my father into buying me a camera if I passed my baccalaureate. He kept his word, and while I was studying law—studies which I never finished—I also began making films on my own in the countryside.

A little while later, when I was about twenty, I met a producer and worked for the next three years as his assistant. Then I made a few industrial

Left, Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (France, 1990). Adapted from Edmond Rostand's play by Rappeneau and Jean-Claude Carrière, it stars Gérard Depardieu (at right) as Cyrano and Anne Brochet as Roxane.

French director and screen-writer. His film *Cyrano de Bergerac* won ten Césars, the French national film award.

Right, Jean-Paul Rappeneau and Gérard Depardieu holding their 1991 Golden Globe Awards, presented by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

shorts and a short commissioned film called *Chronique provinciale* ("Provincial Chronicle").

▸ What made you take the plunge and become a director?

— With Alain Cavalier, I had produced an outline for the film that was to become *A Matter of Resistance*. When I actually began to write the film, I noticed that the dramatic situations we had invented inevitably turned into comedy. I called Alain to talk to him about this and told him I was worried. He answered, "Don't stop, whatever you do! Let it come!" I shot the film in 1965. It received the Prix Delluc and was a box-office hit. Since then I've never stopped, although I go at my own pace which is rather slow.

Today I am happiest directing big pictures like *Cyrano de Bergerac* or *Le hussard sur le toit* ("The Hussar on the Roof"). I think that's what I was made for.

▸ What about the technical stuff?

— I picked it up gradually, especially through making advertising films where I really discovered and developed the techniques of cinema, especially as my approach to films was rather literary. I started making advertising films after my third feature, *Lovers like Us*.

▸ What future do you see for the cinema?

— That's the big question. Business and artistic problems are intertwined. Here in Europe we have got to resist the American offensive and at the same time ask how to renew the film medium. Hasn't it all been said before?

But all my doubts fade away when I talk to my two sons. Their enthusiasm for the cinema is intact. They know all the interesting films that are going to come out. They rush to see them, then talk about them. I'm expecting a comeback of film fandom, with different masters and different landmarks. No, basically, I have no fears about the future of the cinema.

▸ What are your feelings about *auteur* cinema?

— I respect and like *auteur* films. I am completely convinced that the cinema needs *auteurs*. I hope I'm one of them. Moreover when I write and develop my films, I try to write with the public in mind. It's extremely important. Without losing an iota of my ambition, I've always got the public in mind. I like to think that I'm "a film-goer who makes films". ■

Catherine Deneuve and Yves Montand starred in Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Lovers Like Us* (France, 1975).

Windows of opportunity

by Jerry Palmer

Countries where the film industry is trying to find a niche between television and the powerful international distribution networks

The animation department at the Uzbekfilm studios in Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

Some years ago, when I was in Budapest, Hungary, researching an article about Hungarian cinema, I found that each of Hungary's four film studios had an annual budget sufficient to produce around ten films, roughly equal to the special effects budget for a single Hollywood major film.

Recently I read in a report from India that in the villages local businessmen rent a satellite dish that is capable of receiving the output of Star TV from the Asiasat satellite and run cables to rented TV receivers. This makes television reception extremely cheap. How can locally produced films—or even television—compete with this satellite which transmits old American TV series bought at a bargain price?

But neither of these stories has quite the ending we might expect. The Hungarian film industry has survived the transition to the free market. And in India the availability of cheap cable television has produced a rapidly expanding market for local language TV showing Bombay-made films and local programming.

These stories from Hungary and India illustrate the threats and the opportunities that are offered to world cinema by television and the American film industry. Both the threats and the opportunities are complicated, and neither derive only from the fact that America is the majority pro-

Beqabu, an Indian film by M. N. Chandra, was shot in studios located in the Bombay suburbs.

ducer of films and TV programmes in the world.

Does Hollywood dominate world cinema? It is no longer the world's biggest producer of films. The Indian film industry produces more feature films per year than the United States. Japan and China are big producers, too. On the other hand, Indian, Chinese and Japanese films are only viewed by local or expatriate populations, whereas American films are seen more or less all over the world. Certainly few Japanese viewers will have seen Indian films, and vice-versa, but substantial numbers of viewers in both these countries will have seen many American films.

Thirty years ago most of the revenue from U.S. films came from sales inside the United States. In the last year—for the first time—U.S. films made more from their sales outside the United States than from the U.S. market. U.S. control over foreign distribution has increased in importance recently. Although there is nothing in the logic of distribution systems to prevent the U.S. studios distributing foreign films as well as U.S. ones, in fact the U.S. market is so huge in comparison to most other national markets and American audiences so much prefer home-produced films, that the Hollywood studios place most emphasis on selling home-made products.

For as long as international distribution networks are U.S.-dominated, Hollywood will dominate world cinema. This is not because home-based movie industries in other countries are incapable of producing material that their local audiences prefer—we know in the case of the Asian countries that this is not so. And the case of European television is interesting here too. In Europe during the last few years home-produced programming has started to pull in bigger audiences than imported U.S. programmes. The message is clear: where home-produced material that appeals to the local audience is available, and a distribution system which is not American-owned is in place, American culture finds it more difficult to penetrate.

This introduces the second point: to what extent is television a threat to world cinema? To understand this, we must be clear about what the differences between film and television are. They are not primarily distinguished by their systems of representation—despite differences in picture quality—but by their systems of transmission. Although films are of course shown on television, the television system is fundamentally different from the cinema system because it is (potentially if not actually) multi-channel, because it reaches directly into the home and because it is transmitting more-or-less permanently a mix of programme types. If the current experiments with high-definition TV turn into broadcast or cable systems, the differences in picture quality between film and television will virtually disappear.

Film and TV: an ambiguous relationship Indeed, one of the ways in which television has most fundamentally influenced cinema is in the restriction of cinema to narrative fiction—"feature films", as they are called in English. Before television, cinema was used to make documentaries, newsreels and advertising. The cinematic forms of the first two have been killed off completely by television, the latter marginalized. That is to say, the differences in the transmission systems have created what are apparently the differences in the systems of representation. Film and television tell different types of story because of these restrictions in film story-telling.

For many years film-makers blamed television for the decline in cinema audiences. But research in Britain suggested that it was not television that stole the audiences, but home entertainment in general, in combination with the shift away from the large urban centres whose inner city population was the source of the enormous cinema audiences between 1930 and 1960. Television also offered new opportunities to film-makers, both in the form of extra revenue through TV screenings of movies and through commissioning

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feature films that probably would not have been made without this support.

The relationship between film and television is very ambiguous. On the one hand, the presence of television sets in every home presents an alternative to cinema. At the moment differences in picture quality, plus the social value of going out to the cinema instead of staying at home, reduce the competition from television. But the differences in picture quality will probably be removed by high-definition TV. If the information superhighway becomes a transmission system for entertainment, it is possible that we will be able to select movies from a "movie bank" for transmission into our own homes. But it is likely that the movies in question will only be the most popular ones, since a system which would allow anyone to select any movie they liked for transmission would probably not be economically viable.

If only the most successful movies are to be transmitted, they will probably be American because those are the films which attract the biggest audiences internationally. This means that the cost of each viewing can be reduced because of the likely number of viewings. On the other hand, local distribution networks using the superhighway (if there are to be such things) might be able to benefit from a high number of local viewings of films made on a relatively low budget for local audiences. Here another factor comes into play: it is already technologically possible to show a film on a video disc which has several alternative sound-tracks in different languages. This potentially enlarges the audience for films in non-majority languages without using sub-titles, which tend to put audiences off.

It is likely to be control of distribution systems rather than production systems which determines whether world cinema can survive the threats from new TV systems and American predominance and turn them into opportunities. ■

Steven Spielberg's *E. T.* (United States, 1982) unites a gentle creature from outer space and his young earthling protector.

Filming at the National Picture Studios in Rangoon (Myanmar).

The first Indian

by Romain Maitra

Three studios where the world's most prolific film industry was born

The Indian film industry was born and took root in and around Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, major port cities where there was a strong backdrop of intellectual and theatre activities. From the 1920s on, enterprising film-makers in these regions made films in a variety of genres such as mythology, history, folklore and fantasy, whose popularity cut across social barriers. These films were products of the studio system. The major studios had distinct identities of their own. Three of them in particular left a mark on Indian cinema in the 1930s.

New Theatres Limited, with its famous banner of a trumpeting elephant, was the vision of Birendra Nath Sircar, a civil engineering graduate of London University, who gathered a group of talented men around him and raised Indian cinema from the status of a novel form of entertainment to that of an art. New Theatres was a nursery for a number of directors and actors who later became household names.

As one cinema historian has written, "Sircar wanted, not a production company, studio and cinema halls, but a system, a pervasive, self-supporting, efficiently managed, supremely equipped network of men and women and machines which would sell the celluloid dream like it had never been sold before in India, in markets determined by the caprice of public preference." The artistes, who worked as salaried staff and not on contract, had to be at the studios whether or not they were working on a film; when not acting, an actor might be given riding or fencing lessons or assigned temporary technical duties.

New Theatres' first big success, *Chandidas,* was based on the life of a Hindu saint. With *Devdas,* adapted from a famous Bengali novel, it captured the huge all-India market. Most Indian films had hitherto been vehicles for song-and-dance sequences, but *Devdas* was a serious treatment of a powerful dramatic situation. A fire in the studios in 1940 and later a sharp financial decline brought about the demise of New Theatres in 1955. The impact of communalism in the 1940s and the advent of the star system also helped to seal its fate.

The second important studio, Bombay Talkies, was founded in 1934 by Himan Rai and became the true precursor of the Indian commercial cinema. Its films captivated audiences with a blend of political and social

The logo of New Theatres Limited.

studios

A Throw of Dice (India, 1929) by Franz Osten and Himansu Rai, was produced at the Bombay Talkies studio.

comment, glamour, melodrama and melodious soundtracks. *Achhut Kanya* (1936) is the tragic tale of an Untouchable girl in love with a Brahmin youth, who ends by giving up her life on the altar of caste barriers and religious bigotry. Films such as *Savitri* (1937), a mythological tale from the *Mahabharata*, effectively captured Hindu values and sentiments.

Foreign technicians, mainly German and British, were employed at the Talkies, and a lot of modern equipment was used. A staff of more than 400 Indians ate together in the company canteen, irrespective of the castes to which they belonged. Well-known actors would sweep the floors if need be. Famous authors conducted seminars for the staff, who were assigned a variety of duties to broaden their knowledge of the film medium.

Prabhat Studio was launched by a group of men who had learned their trade as junior apprentices in a film company in Kolhapur. One member of the team had done odd jobs at the Bombay docks before becoming the art director. Another had worked as a mechanic, accountant, electrician and scene painter before becoming the sound recordist. The most important director of Prabhat's early films, V. Shantaran, started out as a sign-painter and doorman in a makeshift cinema. These barely educated men possessed indomitable will, energy and organizing ability. In 1933 they moved to a fine location on the outskirts of Pune, 100 miles south of Bombay, covering a wide expanse ranging from hilly tracks to marshland The facilities at this great film production complex, which had no highbrow pretensions, ranged from a huge studio and art factories to accommodations for the staff and actors.

The veteran actress Durga Khote recalled later, "At Prabhat we reported for work at 5:30 in the morning, and we knew that shooting would be definitely over by 4:30 in the afternoon. There was no departure from this routine as shooting was done in sunlight, and no artificial lights or arc lights were used. We were called for work at 5:30 because it took two full hours for make-up with the hard grease of the old days. By 8 o'clock we were ready for takes, and by tea-time we used to pack up, as no more shooting was possible with the fading sunlight."

Prabhat Studio made many good films, including *Amrit Manthan* ("Churning of Nectar"), produced by V. Shantaram after his return from a study tour of German studios. *Amrit Manthan* was a milestone in film technique and evoked a wide-ranging humanitarian appeal on the issue of animal sacrifice. Prabhat's peak period lasted barely ten years since it could not cover a wider market due to its early regional language films in Marathi.

In addition to these three studio units, an equally strong complex of studios arose in the mid-1930s in Madras, South India. Films in the South Indian languages enjoyed autonomy from the all-embracing Hindi film market. Modern Theatres near Madras, founded by T. R. Sundaram in 1936, had a staff of 250 and made an average of three films per year. ■

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Romain Maitra is an Indian journalist and critic specializing in dance and the fine arts. He also writes scripts for documentary films.

The emblem of Prabhat Studio.

The logo of Bombay Talkies Ltd.

Suresh Jindal

interview

When did the Indian cinema begin?

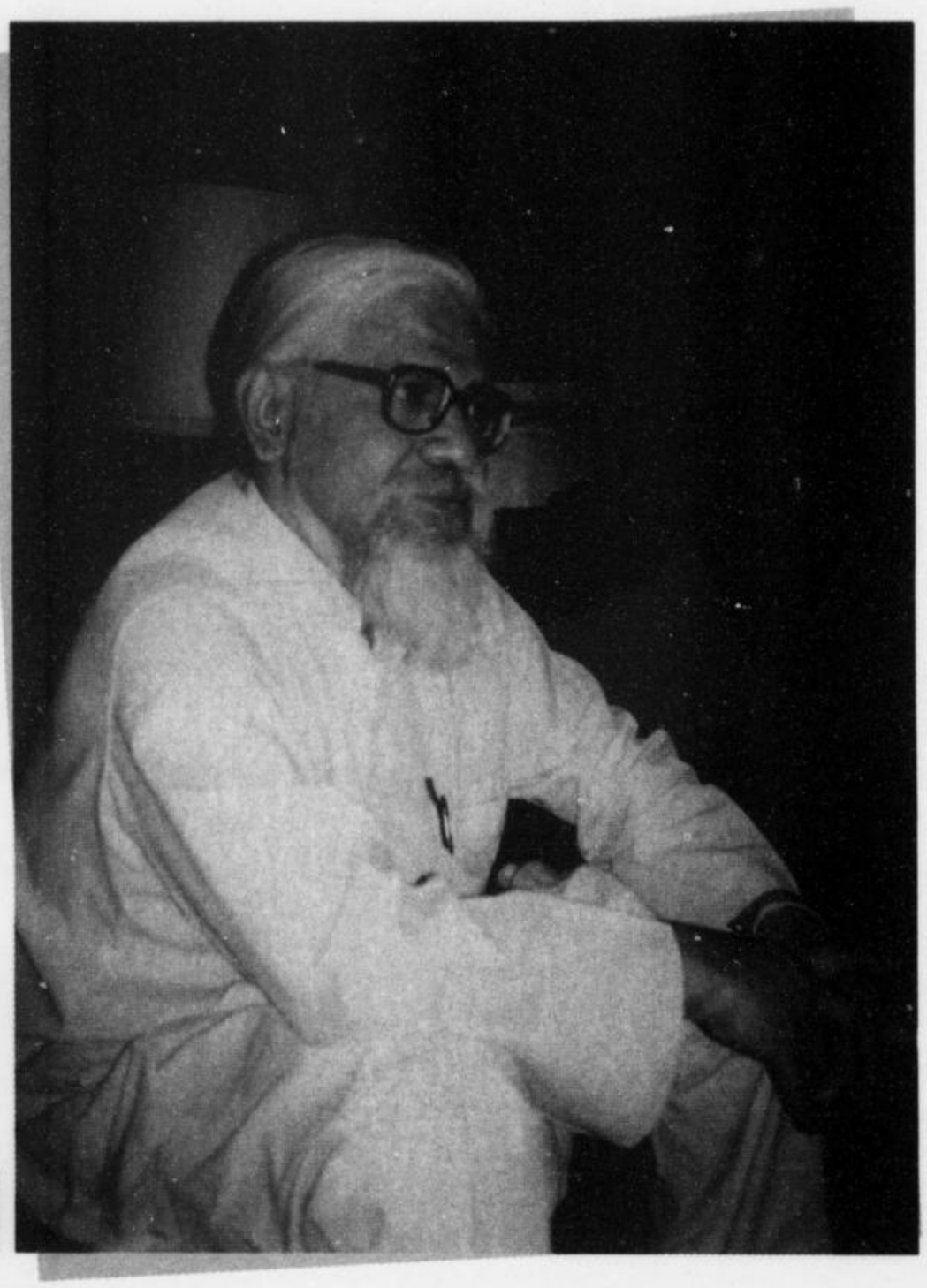
— It dates back to the days of the Lumière brothers who were the first to show films in India. That was in Bombay at the turn of the century. In 1901, Charles Pathé brought his cameras here. The first Indian films were made in 1912, including the famous *Raja Harishchandra* by Dhundiraj Phalke, who had been trained in Europe. To edit his films, he held up the frames between his fingers.

The Indians, who were under British rule at that time, soon realized what advantages they could draw from the cinema. They turned to mythology and history to find their roots and indirectly oppose the British.

Taking their inspiration from Méliès and the Lumière brothers, they invented special effects which still seem astonishing today. The marvellous Hindi cinema was born in the wake of the nationalist movement. Realism was a later development.

With the coming of talkies and music, four main genres appeared: the mythological film, the historical saga, the musical comedy and the social chronicle—often heavily influenced by Soviet cinema. Major directors emerged, such as Santaram and Chetan Anand.

The Indian cinema soon became popular. Film techniques were easily adapted to the Indian scene. India produced an enormous output of, essentially, new versions of American films—something that would create copyright problems today. Later, a certain snobbery led us to prefer American and English films to our own Indian productions. This had the blessing of the English government, which was very keen on creating a local elite of "brown sahibs".



Suresh Jindal (left) is an Indian producer whose film *The Chess Players* (1977), directed by Satyajit Ray, won an Indian national award for the best Hindi film in 1978.

The golden age of Indian cinema came after the Second World War...

—Yes, in the 1950s and 1960s. After

Left, Mrinal Sen's *Genesis* (India, 1986), featuring Shabana Azmi, Nasruddin Shah and Om Puri.

independence, Indian films carved out for themselves an enormous and constantly growing market. That was the golden age. Famous actors like Ram Rao were idolized on a scale unknown in any other country. The actor even came to be identified with the gods he played. That is still the case today. The masters included Guru Dutt, Raj Kappur, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and many others. But the age of the great masters is over now.

◗ Is that when your career began?

— At that time I was in the United States, studying at the University of California at Los Angeles. Reading was my first passion. But in the 1960s I lived on a diet of American films. At the same time, at the university, where we talked for hours on end, I discovered Fellini, Kurosawa and even Satyajit Ray. But I knew that I would return to India and I did so in 1974 when my father died. I soon decided to set up a distribution company. My mother was opposed to the idea. At that time the cinema was not highly thought of. It was a job for a *marasi*, a strolling player. "You are going to become a *marasi*," she said. To which I replied: "If I have bad luck tomorrow, I'll blame you." I promised to come back to her if films didn't work out. But my company was successful and I am still going strong.

◗ How is distribution organized in India?

— As a general rule, the cinema owner asks the distributor to agree to a flat rate price. He does not share in the risk. That is the first obstacle, especially for ambitious films. But the National Film Development Corporation, a production company in which the government and television are both involved, helps to produce high-quality films. However, the funds raised are often ridiculously small. And the major distribution circuits do not take these films. There is also the language problem (it is unusual, for instance, for a Bengali film to be shown elsewhere in India), and the inadequate number of cinemas, to say nothing of poor projection quality.

◗ How does the Indian cinema stand today?

— Our national market is threatened. For the first time, the Americans dubbed one of their films, *Jurassic Park*, in Hindi. It was a smash hit. That success is bound to make them continue. How can we resist? I really wonder. First, we must give up the idea that our domestic market is untouchable. We must fight and invent. And we can only do so if we regain our lost passion, or better still a new passion, for the cinema. ■

Satyajit Ray's *Ghare-baire* (India, 1984) based on a story by Rabindranath Tagore.

Mani Kaul

An Indian director whose film *Siddeshwari* won an Indian National Award for the best documentary in 1989, Mani Kaul adapted Dostoevski's *The Idiot* for the screen in 1991.

How did you first come into contact with the cinema?

— I came to the cinema rather late in life, because I had eyesight problems as a child. I was already thirteen when the doctors found a cure. It was then that I discovered the world—electricity wires, for example, which I had never seen before, and of course the cinema. I think the first film which left its mark on me was *Helen of Troy* (1955), an American costume drama.

First, I wanted to be an actor. Of course my father objected. Then I saw a documentary and I realized that films could be made without actors. It was a revelation. I remember the film was about Calcutta.

Fortunately, I had an uncle who was a film director in Bombay. In fact he was well known. His name was Mahesh Kaul. I met him and he was kind enough to tell my father not to insist too much on his opposition to my plans. He even advised him to send me to the film school in Pune. I spent three years there and still have excellent memories of it. I remember one remarkable teacher in particular: Ritwik Ghadak, who was himself a director.

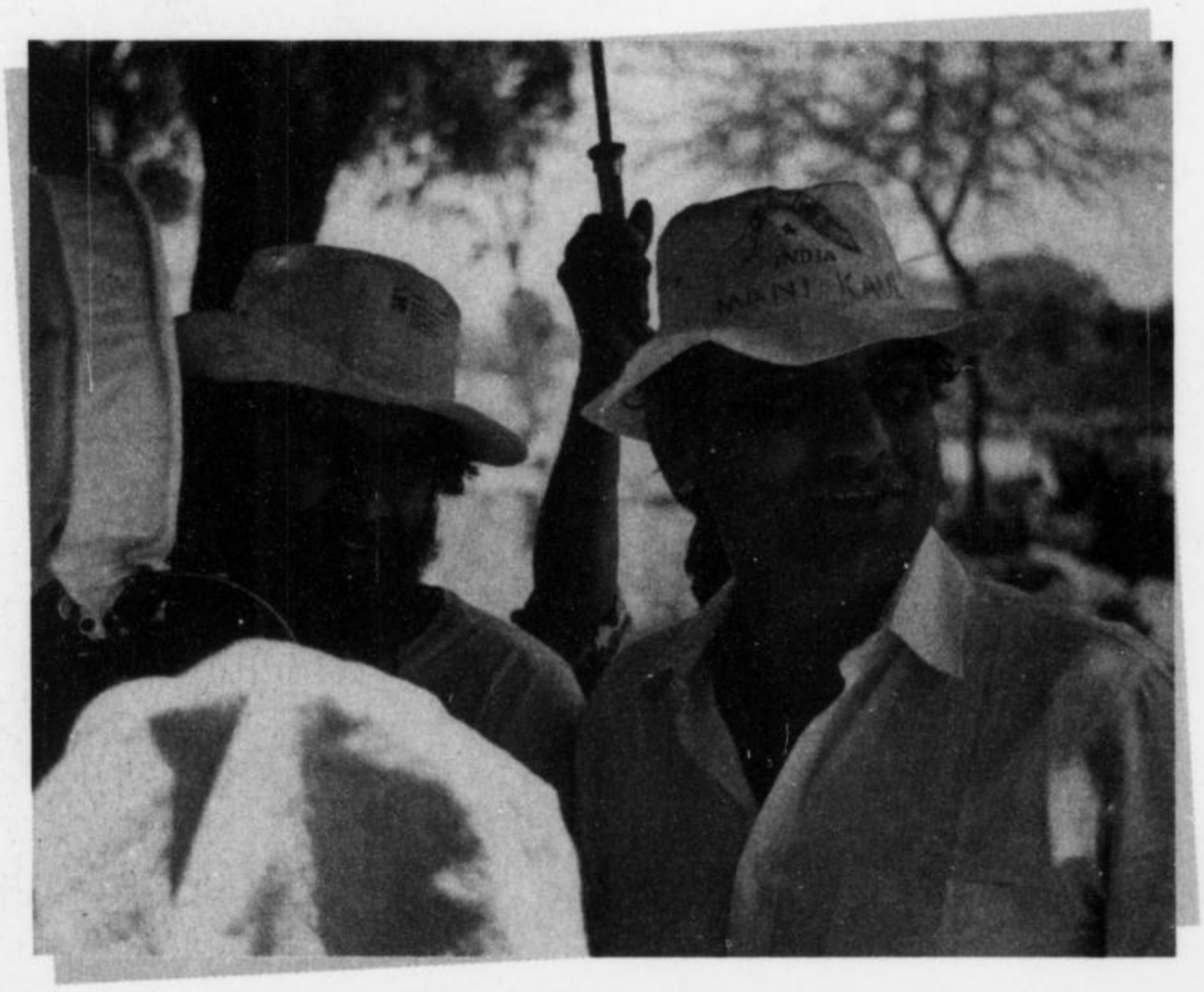
I studied under his guidance and I think I was his favourite pupil. But I betrayed him. When I saw Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), my outlook changed completely. From then on I swore by Bresson, whom I met later in Paris—that was a red letter day for me.

One Indian film left a deep impression on me at the time, and that was Abrar Alvi's *The Master, the Mistress and the Slave* (1962), with Guru Dutt. I saw it about twenty times, because a friend of mine had a cinema in Jaipur. The film portrays the disintegration of a land-owning family. It was a big hit throughout India. I also saw many American films and films by the great Indian masters.

I began by making commissioned documentaries. I made one on civics, for example. In 1968, I started work on my first full-length feature film. Because of a strike which went on for several months, it took two years to complete. Then I went on as best I could, often going back to documentaries. In my films I tried to put across my great interest in the theatre, music and Indian song. Without sacrificing my own tastes, I am always searching for that elusive rapport with the public which is indispensable to us filmmakers.

What about television in India?

— It began in the early 1960s, but the big event was the broadcast of the Asian Games in 1982. In the days of Indira Gandhi, television was systematically regarded as a means of education. Everything was in the hands of the state, with no private involvement. That situation lasted for a long time. Only one cinema film was shown each week. The other programmes dealt mostly with agriculture and



Indian director Mani Kaul and his cameraman during the filming of *Mati Manas* ("Mind of the Earth").

industry (as in communist countries), although there were some about music, yoga and science. There was no competition whatsoever with the cinema.

All that changed in 1984. First because of the appearance of pirate videos. The lack of copyright protection opened the door to intensive piracy. "Video rooms" opened all over the country to show pirate copies of films made very cheaply in very poor conditions.

At the same time, television itself changed. It began to make soap operas and open up to private investment. That was the second threat after pirate videos. This time the cinema was hard hit. Many films lost money, something which had been very unusual until then.

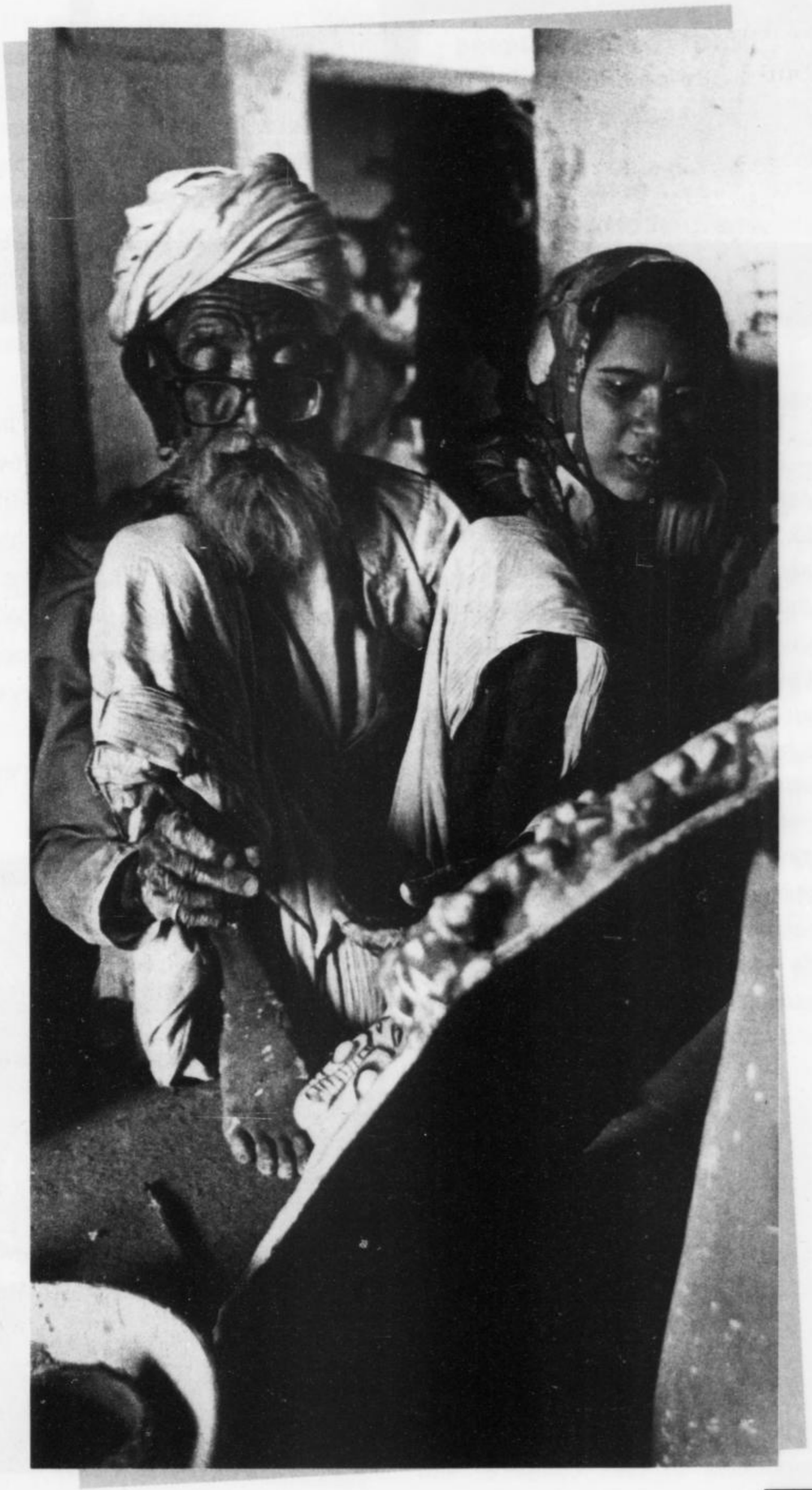
Today twenty-five channels can be widely received and the number is growing. We also receive foreign channels, especially American channels such as CNN and MTV. As a result, Indian girls are abandoning their traditional costume and wearing jeans and other Western-style clothes.

The audience has also changed—both for the cinema and television. Vulgarity and violence have appeared, just like everywhere else. And one private channel is just like another. They all broadcast more or less the same programmes.

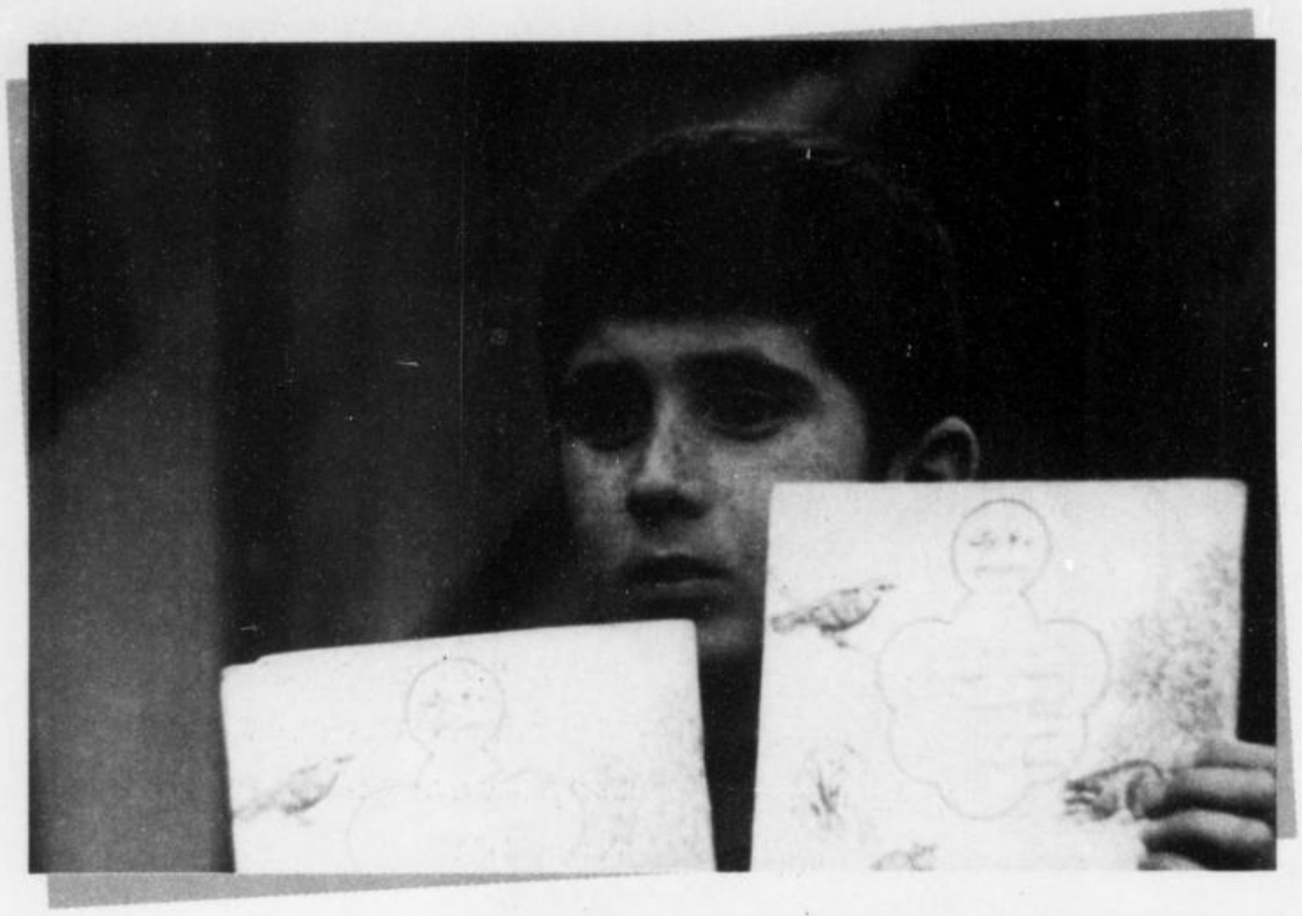
▸ Are fewer films being made than before?

— No. Strangely enough, the number of films being made has hardly changed and the geographical distribution of film production is much the same as before. Four states (out of twenty-five) account for half the output. The list is headed by films made in Tamil in Tamil Nadu State in the south, followed by films made in Telugu, also in the south. Hindi films only occupy third place. Andhra Pradesh State is also a major producer. Whenever a film is made in one of these four systems, it is immediately translated into the other three languages.

The Indian cinema is threatened today by a real danger, apart from hardening of the arteries, and that is the invasion of dubbed American films. The offensive has been launched. We wonder how we can react from inside what we thought was a fortress. But, despite its strong personality, India clearly risks being faced with a major problem: the gradual disappearance of genuinely Indian images, words and cinema, possibly leading to a loss of identity. ■



A potter and his granddaughter in Mani Kaul's *Mati Manas*, a documentary on the history of pottery.



Abbas Kiarostami

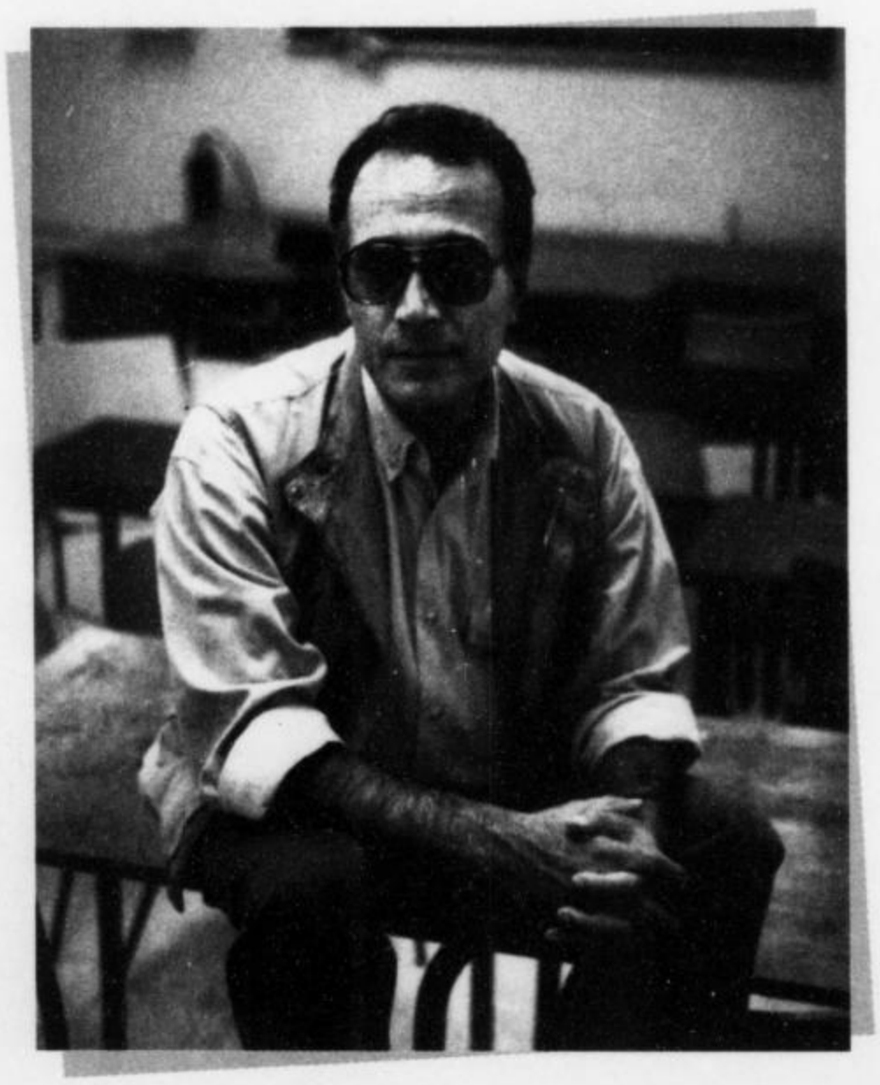
interview

Why do you make films?

— Because I can't do anything else! Making films is something I have to do. It's like dreaming: it comes naturally, it fulfils a need. The driver of an Underground train who spends hours travelling through the dark tunnels dreams all the time. While they're in prison, convicts dream of the world outside. Blind people see by means of dreams. Life is impossible without dreams, and thanks to the cinema I can give shape to some of mine and let others share them. A link with other people is made through my dreams. It's a strange kind of pleasure, communicating with people I don't know and can't see but who can see my dreams. . . .

All artists yearn to communicate. It makes them ill if they can't share their dreams. I must be one of these people. This need links me to my audiences and, first and foremost, to my actors. During filming, and because of it, I empathize so strongly with the actors that they become part of me. The relationship becomes so intense that when shooting is over I find it impossible to part company with them. That's why my film *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987) had two sequels, *And life goes on . . .* (1992) and *Under the Olive Trees* (1994), and will be continued in my future films. I am so fond of the region where these three films were made and the people who live there that I am in no hurry to move on.

What happens behind the camera gives me just as much pleasure as what happens in front of it. Behind it, one catches life unawares; in front, everything is planned and organized, even the actors' feelings and movements. Everything is subordinated to technical requirements. The equipment, the constraints of photography, the overpowering presence of the crew and especially of the director, all



The Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami (left) has made some 20 films, the latest of which, *Under the Olive Trees* (1994), was entered in competition at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival.

affect the actors' attitudes. The liveliness and excitement that are to be found behind the camera often dry up, fade away and die in front of it. We should have to get rid of the film crew and all their paraphernalia before the actors' performance could be the real thing, a true reflection of their identity. Only then could their complex inner life become visible.

People do not know themselves until they get to know their own repressed desires. They have to be revealed to themselves. Before any transformation can take place, we have to know our own legitimate needs, which originate in dreams. Our dreams grow out of the bitter experience of daily life, which they endeavour to transcend by seeking a life of their own.

The cinema can provide a window looking out from the mediocrity of life on to the world of dreams. Reality is the launching pad for dreams. Everything must start from reality, just as you launch a kite into the wind but hold on to the strings. The kite-strings lead us to reality. We enter the dream world and come back to real life.

After dreaming, reality may seem easier to bear, since the change of scene has brought an influx of energy and alleviated the sufferings of everyday existence. On the other hand, reality may seem intolerable, uglier and more oppressive than before—a dead end. If this is the case, then we must change reality. We follow our dream until reality is transformed into dream and dream into reality.

◗ What difficulties are Iranian film-makers facing today?

— First of all, the same difficulties as those faced by film-makers the world over. No director can be sure his or her film will be a success. Generally speaking, producers want to back a good film, a quality film, but above all a money-spinner—and there's never any guarantee of that. One of the hardest things is to win a producer's confidence.

The difficulties specific to Iran, an Islamic country, are the limits imposed by religion. We film-makers are great liars; we create lies to suggest truths. We bring in a man from one place and a woman from another, and select a particular house and a particular child to present a true picture of a family. But if the woman has to get out of bed wearing a veil, I am the first to find the scene implausible. I live in an Islamic society and my family are Muslims, but neither my sister nor my wife wear headscarves in bed. So far I have managed to avoid this kind of scene which gives a false picture of reality, but because of these restrictions many subjects are automatically ruled out:

◗ Is that one of the reasons why you work with children?

— Not at all. I like working with children. It started quite by chance and then I came to like having them around. They are at ease in front of the camera. They are not thinking about fame or money. They are amenable.

◗ No American films are allowed to be distributed in Iran. What do you think of this ban?

— It's both a good thing and a bad thing: good for Iranian film-makers, who are protected from competition from American films and have been able to make films and win the appreciation of cinema-goers; bad for Iranian audiences, who can never see American pictures at the cinema. The situation clearly has both negative and positive aspects, negative because any ban is undesirable but positive as regards the protection of the Iranian film industry.

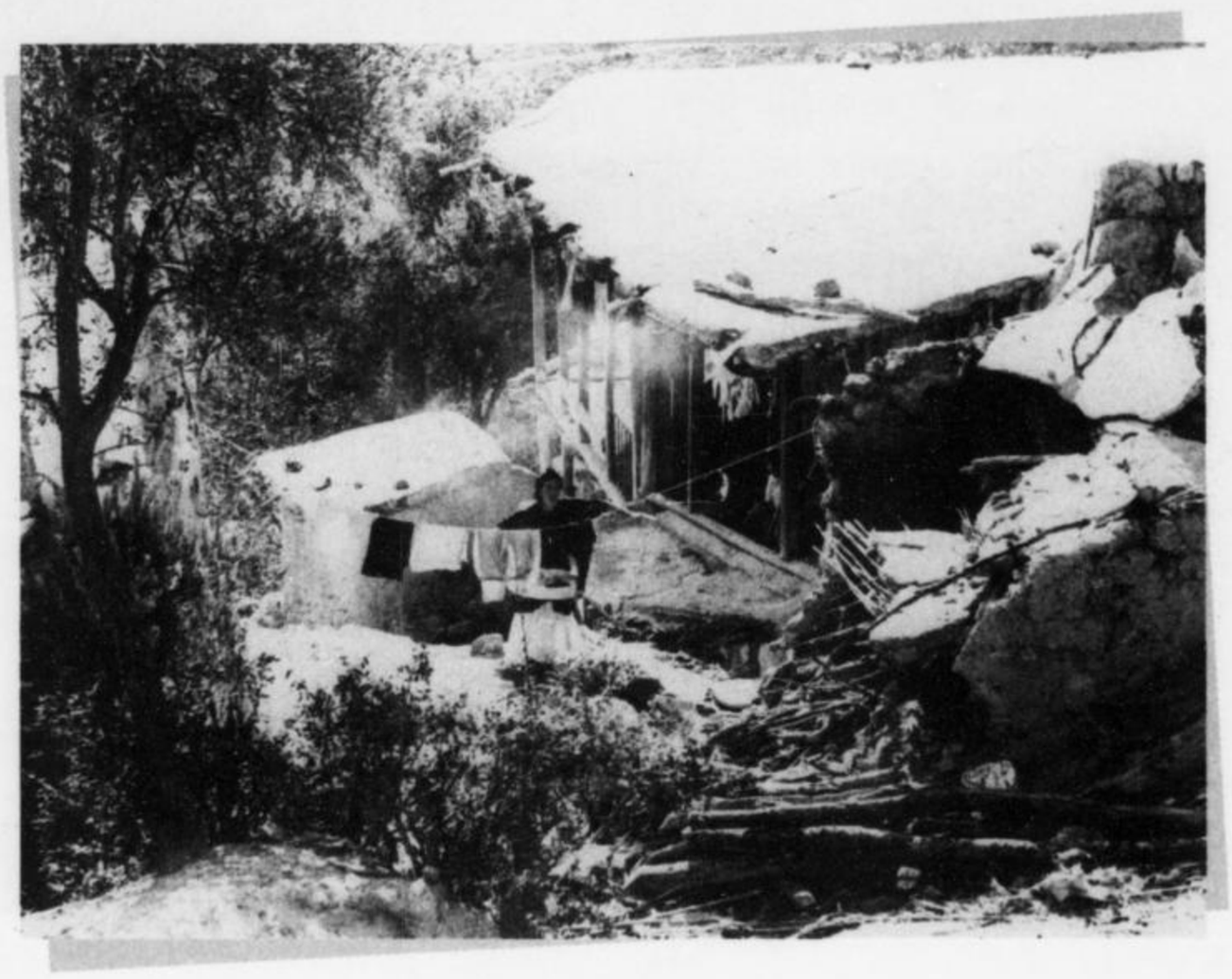
◗ Doesn't the fact that people regularly watch foreign films on video stop them going to the cinema?

— There is a certain class of people who no longer go to the cinema, who are video consumers. The cassettes are of poor quality. They are recorded abroad direct from television sets and distributed in Iran.

The recent introduction of satellite television has created a flagrant contradiction between what people, young people in particular, see at home and what they see outside the home. To take one example, children are not allowed to go to school in jeans but at home my son can see, on satellite television, images of freedom that constantly conflict with life in Iran. This contradiction is psychologically harmful and wounding for him. It is sad for a film-maker like me to end up saying that it would be better if we didn't have satellite dishes in Iran. When a balance cannot be struck between the inside and outside, you have to do as best you can, so my

Opposite page, above, *Where is the Friend's Home?* (Iran, 1987). Right, *Under the Olive Trees* (Iran, 1994). Two feature-length films by Abbas Kiarostami.

And Life Goes On (Iran, 1992), was released the same year that Abbas Kiarostami was awarded the Roberto Rossellini Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for his life's work.



son and I agreed that we should shut the television set away in a locked cupboard. But I know that my heart is locked in that cupboard too. While I was out, he opened the cupboard and plugged the set back in.

▸ Who goes to the cinema in Iran?

— Ordinary people, the man in the street, the people from the bazaars—what we call the "third class"—but also middle-class people. A film currently showing in Tehran, *The Red Hat and the Cousin*, is breaking all box-office records. Its success proves that people need to go to the cinema to be entertained. They don't go to keep up with developments in the art of cinematography or to be preached at.

▸ Let's go back to your work with children. . .

— Working with children has helped me in my private life more than in my professional life. Children know less than adults but they have a healthier attitude to life. I've made the best possible deal with them: I've provided them with knowledge and they've brought me health. Children have taught me to live. They are budding mystics.

▸ The Chinese philosopher Lao-tze was nicknamed "the old child" . . .

— When I had a real problem I would put it to my younger son, who always had a magnificent answer. They have an answer to everything: "So what?" It's great. You present them with terrible disasters and they reply "So what?" You tell a child "Wrap up well or you'll catch cold" and he replies "So what?", "You'll get wet"—"So what?", "You'll have a temperature"—"So what?"

When times are hardest they answer your questions without hesitation. They stop what they're doing for a moment and come out with their "So what?", then go back to their game. Like the Sufi mystics, they take advantage of the moment, they live in the present, the here and now. I believe the definition of mystics also fits children. There are budding mystics all around us and we don't appreciate them.

▸ Apart from children, you like to work with non-professional actors, mostly from rural backgrounds. How much difference does appearing in a film make to their lives?

— Financially speaking, their situation is improved but you need to get very close to them to know how much they may have changed inside. Maybe it harms their ego, as some Iranian journalists have claimed—they become a focus of attention for a short while and then all of a sudden they are forgotten. But I have no choice in the matter, I can't re-engage the same children all the time. When I feel guilty about this, I try to imagine how I would feel in their shoes. Would I refuse a pleasant dream, knowing that when I awoke life's difficulties would still be there? No, I would be prepared to make the trip. . . .

▸ What is the first image you remember seeing on film?

— The roaring Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lion, in 1950, when I was ten. But I also played with bits of film when I was small. I thought they were stamps that had to be looked at against the light. . . .

▸ How did you get into film-making?

— By chance. I studied at the Tehran Faculty of Fine Arts, designed advertising posters and illustrated children's books. In 1969 I was asked to do some work for the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents. I worked with amateurs on my first film, *Bread and the Street* (1970). It's the story of a child who buys some bread and wants to go home but is frightened by a dog in the street. We didn't have a child actor or a trained dog and I was a novice myself. We three non-professionals got together, and that became a kind of model for my later work. ■

A silver-screen symphony

by Elie Faure

Elie Faure (1873-1937) was one of the great art critics of the twentieth century. An ardent humanist who believed in the unity of the universe, of humanity and of art, he had an all-encompassing vision of art, in which he saw parallels between works of different periods and cultures. The article published here, written in 1937, is his response to a survey on the intellectual role of the cinema carried out by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation (IIIC), the forerunner of UNESCO.

I. A NEW ART

Whether a film be good or bad, whether it be fiction, science or documentary, the informed observer cannot fail to detect in it the characteristic features of an absolutely distinctive art form, a form emerging, it should be noted, at a time when the most varied or successive cultures seemed nearly to have exhausted those forms of expression whereby they had been handed down to us. By a necessary coming together that might be called a coincidence, were it not for the fact that the machine civilization which engendered the cinema had not at the same time brought face to face various ideas and values, motion pictures came into being at the very moment when art forms quite unfamiliar to us—Cambodian, Javanese and Mexican architecture and sculpture and especially African and Polynesian carvings—came along to overturn our most firmly established aesthetic concepts and hence to sow the seeds of doubt and anguish in our hearts and minds. It was also the moment when, for the same reasons, an immense task of destruction and

reconstruction was under way in minds shaped by economics, replacing, among most of the so-called civilized peoples and in all fields of thought and action, the concepts of individual aptitudes and aims with the concept of forces and of needs awaiting fulfilment.

There ensued a renewed, if not indeed new, and pressing demand for forms of expression to be devised in response to these needs and forces. The cinema, the offspring of scientific culture and technical development, offered itself as a natural means of meeting that demand, just as music and dance offered themselves to primitive peoples as a way of expressing the culture of myths and as architecture offered itself to the great religious syntheses—Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam—to express the social culture of which they are the sublimated manifestation.

A symphonic mode of expression

The cinema does indeed display all the social features that medieval Christian architecture—to take the closest and most recent example of an endeavour to achieve what I would call a symphonic mode of expression—offered for unanimous acceptance by the multitudes. The cinema is anonymous, like architecture, and like architecture it addresses all possible spectators, regardless of age, gender or country, by the universality of its language, the countless places where the *same film* is or can be shown. It too is obliged, in order to construct its buildings, to marshal financial and organizational resources that are beyond, overwhelmingly beyond, the capacity of the individual. It too can appeal only to rather general, rather simple sentiments in order to gain the immediate acceptance of all. The means employed in architecture are similar to those of the cinema, by which I mean that nearly every trade is or may be involved: on the one hand the stonecutter and the stonemason, the labourer and the glazier, the plumber and the smith, the painter and the master builder; on the other, the wardrobe mistress and the set designer, the electrician and the cameraman, the extra and the effects man, the director and the actor. An analogy to the standardization of film stock can easily be found in the flying buttress or the rib vault, the principle of which remained unchanged throughout Christendom for two centuries. In the social context, the replacement of the feudal system by the towns and guilds is strikingly paralleled by the growth of trades unions and the gradual collectivization of the ownership of the means of exchange and production.

Moreover, a good film may be compared, by virtue of the musical quality of its rhythm and of the sense of communion required of its audience, to the ceremony of the mass, and it may likewise be compared, by virtue of the universality of the sensations it evokes and the feelings it stirs, to the "mystery" that filled the cathedral with throngs of worshippers drawn from every corner of the city and its environs. The cinema is today the most "catholic" of the means of expression that the evolution of ideas and of technology has placed at man's disposal.

Mind and machine

Considering the technical nature of all the processes the cinema employs in order to reach its audience, are we entitled to confer upon it the status of an art—a status which it should possess if it really seeks to express the sentimental aspirations and lyrical outpourings of the multitudes? We certainly are. Just as very many empirical but nevertheless very rigorous sciences went into the building of the cathedrals and the Egyptian or Greek temples, many exact sciences and precision techniques underlie and are employed in film-making.

I must admit I fail to understand for what transcendent, or for that matter practical, reasons this subordination of the most complex feelings and psychological nuances to the revelations and demands of the machine for recording images should present an insurmountable obstacle to the emotions of the audience, when the T-square, compasses and plumbline did not prevent Athenians from admiring the proportions and the play of light within the perfect rectangle described by the Parthenon, and led the eyes of Christians to follow the stone ribbing that lent a musical cadence to the high, shadowed vaulting of the transept of the cathedral of Notre Dame in Soissons. Is not the correspondence between the rhythms that rule the vegetative functions of life and the mathematical laws that govern the universe of stars and molecules the most reliable guarantee of the aesthetic and moral value of that which brings us together in the loftiest communion? Is there, apart from the human voice and dance, any other *direct* means of communication between artists and those they seek to impress? Is there not always something, some man-made tool, that intervenes between the object represented and its representation—the sculptor's chisel and calliper, the painter's canvas, brush and paints, and the writer's pen, ink and paper? Music, whose harmonic texture corresponds to sensations that may be transposed into the

Portrait of Elie Faure (1873-1937) by Picasso (lead pencil, 1922).

mathematical ratios of the keyboard, never reaches the listener except via some "machine" that reproduces those ratios very accurately, and sometimes via a very large number of extremely varied instruments to which the same sets of symbols inflexibly dictate the incredible complexity of the orchestral composition.

The cine camera, too, is only an intermediary between the infinitely varied and prodigiously complex spectacle unfolding before it and the cameraman behind it. The human mind, let us not forget, the mind that built the camera and all the rest of the equipment, the artificial light sources in particular, is constantly called in to discard, arrange, compose and subordinate one to another all the elements that go to make up the poem. As Pascal said of the tennis ball, some place it better than others.

II. A LANGUAGE WITH LIMITLESS POWERS

The cinema records images mechanically, it goes without saying, but who, if not human beings, selects and arranges those images? Whilst the cinema, thanks to its capacity for reproducing gradations of light or form too subtle to be apprehended directly by the naked eye, reveals to us a whole world of harmonies hitherto unseen and often unsuspected by that eye, which sees only those harmonies, it may serve, for the brain for which it is the intermediary, as the point of departure for the discovery of unfamiliar relationships between objects and hence an inexhaustible source of new images and ideas for the keen imagination and lyrical sense.

The emergence of an unsuspected universe

Cinema's great contribution has been to demonstrate to us, by exclusively technical means, the "scientific" or if you wish strictly objective nature of the affinities of colour and analogies of form caught by a few artists (I am thinking of Velasquez, Vermeer, Georges de la Tour, Goya, even Manet) of whose vision we are reminded by certain films—*The Mark of Zorro*,[1] *Underworld*[2] and a few others—a vision so personal that the number of film-goers capable of taking it in is scarcely greater than the number of those who communicate it to us. Could it not be said that Hindu and Khmer sculpture, and the paintings of Tintoretto, Rubens and Delacroix, for example, seem to prefigure the art of recording volumes in movement on film, by virtue of the new spaces they reveal to us, their daring angles of view, their dramatic handling of relief, chiaroscuro and surfaces that twist and turn, appear and disappear? Or that the Egyptians, in the way they modulated light to bring out the undulating, subtle transitions from the background up to and into the profiles, were the forerunners of that continuity in the luminous and microscopically close-up vision of the world that cinema achieves, at least for those that have eyes to see?

Basically, the great artists of the past played the same role in the aesthetic sphere as the Greek philosophers played in the intellectual, and the Old Testament prophets in the moral. They were visionaries. They deciphered with ease, in a book invisible to others, a reality that the cinema unfolds before us with the simplicity of childhood and the precision of arithmetic. The miracle of cinema is that the revelations it offers us advance in step with the automatic process of its own development. Its discoveries are an education for us and dictate the way we work. "Slow motion", for instance, has drawn a whole unsuspected world out of the murk of invisibility. Thanks to it alone we have learned of the meticulous precautions a bullet takes in order to pierce a steel plate or a thick tree. Only thereby do we know that a running dog is performing a patient crawl. Boxing, skating or the flight of birds are forms of swimming or dancing no less graceful than swimming or dancing themselves, and this too we know from slow motion, thanks to which again the poetry of dynamic equilibrium expressed in sport or combat holds no more secrets for us. Each one of the admirable machine's revelations represents, for the dialectical progress of visual and, consequently, metaphysical analysis, a supremely and unprecedentedly sure step along the way.

The eye captures the music of life

This miracle has, incidentally, already given rise to a series of consequences that subject our human conception of the universe to constant pressure. The mechanical recording and screening of images have not only ensured for all time the mutual agreement and cross-fertilization of the most rigorous scientific procedures and the loftiest aesthetic joys; they have to all intents merged

Music that reaches us through the eye

together, within the same form of expression, apprehensible to the senses, the simultaneity of the impressions inflicted upon us by our way of looking at the individual and the succession of feelings it imprints upon our thinking. Is this not a serious betrayal of pure Cartesianism? A good few years ago, I wrote that "the cinema manages, for the first time in history, to arouse musical sensations that are interdependent in space by means of visual sensations that are interdependent in time", and that "in fact, it is a form of music that reaches us through the eye". This incredible phenomenon seems to contain the secret of a power of expression whose unity is the most decisive conquest ever won in our spiritual life, and this may well be the most unexpected philosophical gift that Charlie Chaplin's fanciful and profound genius has bequeathed to us.

We now possess the limitless capacity to absorb the whole of life, even those manifestations of it that are least accessible to the human eye, to cast a dazzling light on the infinitely complex drama of light and shade, of shifts of shape and colour, of the imperceptible undulatory motions that ensure the continuity of gesture in the world of animals and plants, of the infinitesimal rhythms that closely link molecular vibrations to the great pulse of the cosmos, thus precipitating that same drama, in a living, active state, in our innermost lives, where it will determine our psychological attitudes and, soon, even our reflexes.

The possibilities of the language of the cinema thus seem to us to be virtually limitless. With film it is possible to create poetry, novels, drama, history, science, journalism and even grammar—I mean technology. The spoken or written word is necessarily analytical in its means and symbolic in its expressions. A vast area remains out of bounds to it, that of the object given three-dimensional, material form and the languages whereby it is expressed—dance, sculpture, painting, mime, sport, the daily sights and sounds of the street at which words can do little more than hint,

whereas the cinema can automatically incorporate them into the visual, moving reality of its action, while its frame-by-frame development makes it akin to musical composition—to which so many fine films, even silent ones, contrive to suggest a kind of equivalence. There is, furthermore, no language other than, precisely, the spoken word to which music itself can be more closely associated, so much so that its own cadences merge with the beat of the counterpoint. The universalism towards which humankind is moving, unanimously, at an ever-increasing pace now possesses its own instrument of exchange and expansion.

I apologise for emphasizing in this way, while bringing to the fore these infinitely complex means, the *primarily visual* nature of cinema, thus laying myself open to the charge of tautology; but the fact is that the mass audience, and many film-makers, paradoxical as it may seem, have never realized this. When forced to look at the matter from this angle, they think it sufficient to be able to tell a hawk from a handsaw. But the whole question of the eventual destiny of the cinema is wrapped up with the solution to this very problem. I would go further: *it is the whole problem.* What I mean is that no progress can be made therein without relating it at the outset to that education of the visual faculties which the great painters or sculptors dispensed to some and which the cinema alone, by virtue of its function as universal spectacle and its limitless power of insinuation, is capable of dispensing to all. When and if the cinema loses sight of the fact that it is, *first and foremost*, an instrument for producing moving visual harmonies, it immediately goes off the rails, ending up in the same cul-de-sac into which its repeated successes have often side-tracked it and sometimes boxed it in.

III. THE PRIMACY OF THE IMAGE

In the post-war years, the cinema worked very successfully at ridding itself of its preoccupation with the theatre, gradually—and perhaps unbeknown to most film-makers—moving towards a visual, rhythmic interpretation of the world, an interpretation to which increasingly supportive contributions were made by the use of slow-motion, improved lighting methods, technical advances such as double exposure, and also the gradual evolution of silent-film acting in the direction of sobriety.

Cinema is not theatre

The "talkies", and dubbing in particular, cast doubt on all that had gone before, and the visual qualities of films have declined in strict proportion with the improvement in sound. I have just said that the cinema seems to me powerful enough to be able to absorb drama and, since there have been some remarkable successes in that respect, I stand open to the charge of contradicting myself. The fact is, in my opinion, that film cannot fully attain to the nature of theatre without perfecting all the other forms of expression—lyric, plastic, musical, scientific, documentary—that it is known to be capable of assuming, in order to bring to their highest pitch the technical, visual and rhythmic qualities without which film drama would be doomed to rapid decline even before reaching the level of development one is entitled to expect of it. Another point is that it would be absurd—on the pretext that cinema can be more powerfully theatrical than theatre itself—to sacrifice all its resources to this single aspect of its power. If the theatre absorbs the cinema, the cinema is lost, for the time being at least. Film should absorb theatre as theatre itself long ago absorbed music, set design, costume, and the use of extras and mime, while leaving them free to develop independently of it.

The cinema must remain the language of universal life and universal man, getting through to the human mind by means of unanimously communicable processes.

The talkies: listening versus looking

There can be no doubt that sound recording is a crucial achievement for the cinema and holds out prospects that are almost as inexhaustible as those offered by visual images. The voices of the universe—the sounds of the sea and rushing streams, the wind rustling through branches and cornfields, birdsong, the hum of insects, the confused murmur of crowds, the creak of wheels, the panting of machines and the alternation of sound and silence—the voices of the universe envelop, espouse, balance, identify and augment the impressions conveyed by the sight of breaking waves, rain falling on steaming earth, waving corn and foliage, nuptial flights and honey gathering, surging demonstrations and military parades, the rhythmic motions and glints of steel whereby machines mark the beat of modern industry, myriads of undetectable microscopic lives, impressions that form part, as it were, of the shape of a world of a thousand interrelated parts. To be convinced of this one need only watch a silent documentary. Such is the force of habit that it seems to us almost as lifeless as a photograph projected on to a screen seemed to us after the coming of the cinema. To adapt the words of Carlyle (or maybe Whitman) to our present purpose: "If the universe is incomplete, man will be incomplete."

The immense complexity of the world must reach people and enter into them whole and complete. This is precisely why the human voice, which is only one part of it—perhaps the most moving of all, if the silence of the mind withdrawn into itself were unable to challenge its supremacy—should not absorb the whole of the universe, except at certain moments of analysis or emotion that the inner unfolding of the spiritual drama should suffice to determine. This is the same mistake, but in reverse, as that made by Wagnerian drama, which seeks to reinforce music, which is itself expressive enough, with a setting that is external to it. Words are, indeed, sufficient unto themselves, but the universe of which they constitute only a fragment is equally self-sufficient, and if they act in partnership it should not be to the detriment of one of the partners. What I mean is that, except in the case of films that are markedly theatrical in form, the story-line should be organized not around the dialogue but around the image.

IV. FALSE STEPS

The truth of this is evident from the fact that it is already possible, after several years' experience, to measure the retreat

into which the "talkies" have forced the beauty and purity of images. I hope and believe that this retreat will be temporary, but temporary only if the public and its wretched educators reject a cinema that has become subordinate to words and return to a cinema that has words as its subordinate. Words make such demands on the ear, even when they are pointless or stupid and insult the intelligence, that attention is transferred from the image to the words. The audience listens and ceases to look. The image retreats into the background. It becomes merely an illustration of the dialogue, and even the most cultivated member of the audience very soon loses the habit of savouring the beauty of the image, not so much, it is true, in order to savour the beauty of the words as not to miss any twist of the plot.[3] On the many occasions when I have tried stopping my ears, I have found that words and plot draw a double veil between the image and the mind, as one may easily realize by seeing a film first in its original version and then dubbed.

Hallelujah!,[4] for example, in its original version in English, which I have difficulty in understanding and gave up trying to follow, made a very powerful visual impression on me. When it was dubbed into French, that impression vanished because I was listening instead of looking. As you know, this is not the only drawback of "dubbing", that monstrous negation of aesthetic unity whereby the voice fits neither the expression nor the movements nor the human form in action, nor even universal form, and seems extraneous to the events taking place on the screen. For the universe is one and man is one. If you cut man into two while the universe remains one, the whole cosmic drama in which man is only an actor immediately loses, for minds with a modicum of clear-sightedness and hearts with a modicum of nobility, all its emotive power. I might add that "talkies", and especially dubbed films, deprive the cinema of the human universality that, from the beginning, endowed it with psychological power and social importance. The cinema must remain the language of universal life and universal man, getting through to the human mind by means of unanimously communicable processes. Furthermore, as it is even more and more fully than before the language of universal life since the spoken word has been integrated into it, it would be monstrous if words were to give it the *coup de grâce* after providing it with the ultimate means of action.

In silent films, the eye sees through appearances

Not long ago I watched two old silent films, which did not have captions. Although they were unremarkable from the photographic point of view, they impressed me by the way in which images reduced to being self-explanatory suddenly stand out from the screen. Without employing exaggerated gestures, the directors and actors are compelled, in order to make themselves understood, to display constant ingenuity and impassioned intelligence, combinations of attitudes, hence requiring the spectator to rise to the level of attention they call for. Between the visual quality of the film and its psychological interpretation there is a continuous exchange that captions, and even more the spoken word, have done away with. It is the memory of the gestures and expressions that stays with us, not that of the plot, and it is the moral significance of the drama that haunts us and not the story-line. A way of closing a door or placing a soup tureen on a table is far more meaningful without words explaining the significance of the action. Though forewarned, I was surprised to find I retained from these films a very different impression from that inflicted on us by talking films or even captioned silent films. A new world enters into us, the world that held man's attention before speech and created speech by a miracle of intuition and energy, that compels the eye to see through appearances and seek behind them a meaning that words, pandering to our laziness, dispense to us in an arbitrary and indeed often abstract manner, without demanding the slightest effort from us.

This shows particularly clearly what powers of expression the film-maker deprives himself of when he uses words either constantly or unwisely. Only the free arrangement of silence and sound enables the film-maker to pick and choose among countless forms of expression. One silent film, *New Year's Eve*,[5] takes place in three settings, simultaneously or in turn: the street, a drinking den and a small bedroom where a three-cornered domestic drama is raging. The street and bar-room scenes undoubtedly lose much because their characteristic sounds are missing: in the first case the muffled noise of crowds,

King Vidor's *Hallelujah!* (United States, 1929). From left to right, Daniel Haynes, William Fountaine and Nina Mae McKinney.

cars, cries and footfalls, in the second the sounds of singing and the clink of glasses, quarrelling, music, laughter and shouting. If the film were to be remade, who in their right minds would deprive themselves of the dramatic contrasts between the carefree or joyous character of these scenes and the silent tragedy which, only a short distance away and unknown to everyone there, is wreaking havoc in three hearts?

The first casualties

Note, incidentally, that the film-maker, the actor and above all the "producer" are the first casualties of mistaken interpretations of the art of the cinema. Spiritual casualties at any rate, since very few of them realize that they are leading the cinema to perdition and even fewer are worthy of suffering therefrom. The beauty of the images, even when one stops one's ears in order to see them better, seems to diminish from film to film. Compelled to give almost undivided attention to the synchronization of sound and image and to guide the image through the labyrinth of the dialogue, film-makers bother less and less about its intrinsic quality, which they leave to the apparatus alone, heedless of the fact that its chance discoveries need to be helped by the careful choice of motif and decor, by raising or lowering the lighting, varying camera angles to follow movement and gesture, slowing the pace or speeding it up, and using double exposure, slow motion or speeded-up film to stimulate the spectator's dramatic or lyric imagination. In

fact, double exposure and slow motion, which played a crucial part in the development of our understanding of rhythm and image, have almost disappeared from the cinema except, as regards the latter of the two, in the documentary, which in any case uses it only for picturesque effect and seems no longer to understand the aesthetic value of images that show us objective proof of the harmonic continuity of shapes and movements.

The glories of the documentary

We should not, of course, be unduly concerned about this temporary and partial setback for the educational virtues of this admirable apparatus. Although sentimental or romantic films have taken audiences—whose puerility puts up less and less resistance—too far away from them, we can still see scientific films, in which powerful lighting and enormous magnification reveal to us the hitherto secret life of insects, crustaceans, molluscs, flowers, seeds, coats of velvet or satin, the dense, deep glow of shells, the glittering jewels of suction pads, the vibration of pistils and of antennas searching for their prey, the sinuous waving of tentacles, the diamonds and opals of scattering air bubbles, and the harmonious movements involved in the dramas of love and hunger. Or else those accounts of big game hunting in Africa or Indonesia that show in graphic detail the tragic truth of the scenes imagined by artists such as Barye,[6] while others show us the visual subtlety of a Vermeer or a Velasquez. The arabesque of the muscles of the python, the furtive gleam of its scales that allow us to visualize its energy, the ripple of the coats of the leopard or the tiger, the darting gleams of teeth and claws, the splendid sight of skulls or jawbones shaped by the blending, on the undulating bone of their surfaces, of the internal forces of instinct and the external caress of light on their surface. We are also aware that, in spiritual matters, each new conquest has temporarily to be paid for by a retreat, of greater or lesser duration, from former conquests. We likewise know that the cinema is all the more unlikely to be exempt from this universal law insofar as it is richer in its resources and more surprising in the incessant revelations—revelations we are always tempted to exhaust completely, while ignoring the previous revelations, from which the wonderment into which we are cast by each new miracle detaches us before we have even followed them through to their ultimate consequences.

Whenever the subject arises of the "machine" whose extraordinary development has taken us by surprise, a general outcry goes up about the new efforts it demands of our lazy minds. It is nevertheless a human artefact. Its present complexity should not stand in the way of spiritual growth. It may even be regarded as the most encouraging example of the intervention of the mind in the task of organizing the world, which has been, since it began, humanity's specific task. The charges levelled against the machine are always the same, that "price to be paid for progress" which we are unwilling to accept because we persist in seeing "progress" from its moral angle and not from its spiritual angle, from where we would see it as a complex of often antagonistic forces advancing in fugal style, not as an uninterrupted linear development.

V. INEXHAUSTIBLE POSSIBILITIES

And so we are compelled to denounce, in the evolution of this hitherto undreamt-of achievement of our minds and at the very time when it is daily producing felicitous consequences, the false steps that it makes and that are all the more surprising in that each of them causes us to stumble at the threshold of a further advance. An instrument such as the cinema cannot, however, degenerate. Like mathematics, it derives its dynamic concatenations from within itself. It is one of those great starting-points that teach man how proud is his dramatic destiny. Its very universality, which places at its disposal, for the first time ever, the activities and genius of all peoples and all human groups tending in one and the same direction, opens boundless possibilities for its future development. Some of the advances it has made in our own day more or less at the same time as sound recording—animation and colour—present terrible dangers, but those dangers will be overcome by their own power. While it is true that the public's total lack of visual education threatens, in both of these cases, to inflict paltry images upon us, we shall be delivered from their thrall by the training of an elite of artists and technicians. As in the great eras of painting and architecture, it is they and they alone who must gradually impose their own vision, their own feeling for rhythm, movement and colour on wider and wider audiences, especially if social conditions are propitious to the formation and influence of such audiences.

The arabesque of the muscles of the python, the furtive gleam of its scales. . .

Fantasy and imagination in cartoon films

Animation, surely, holds out incomparable promises. Some American productions have already offered what may be the richest prospects that man's poetic genius, always eager for an atmosphere fresh enough to clear its lungs and dense enough to keep it aloft, has glimpsed since the outpouring of lyricism that covered Italian crypts with glowing frescoes, poured twilit magic and floral symphonies into the naves of French churches where the changing light flooded in upon the congregation through stained-glass windows, made English theatres the setting for the impassioned speeches of murderers, kings and maidens, the voices of the tempest and the glitter of the stars, and spread over the heads of the German throngs the echoing vaults of cathedrals whose pillars sprang up from among the stalls of cobblers, watchmakers, brewers and smiths forming a great, instinctively innocent choir of the common people. It is very moving to observe, in this respect, that it is America, so disdained by "intellectuals", so "materialistic", so subservient to "economic" considerations, that, in the sublime disorder of the modern world, in the course of this immense act of parturition which resembles the chemical formation of some unknown substance in a bubbling crucible more than some religious or moral drive towards "idealism", should be offering this fantastical imagination, this rhythmic verve, this flame of poetry intoxicated with freedom, joy, mischief and unflagging invention.

Have you seen wild flowers, buttercups and moss joining in with the work of the tiny insects and the love-making of the birds, flower-bells ringing for the nightingale's wedding, dolls marching mechani-

cally to the quacking of ducks, ants and caterpillars advancing in procession to the crystalline song of the toads, new-born maybugs showered with dew from the stamens of cherry blossom? Considering all the poetry awakened from these proliferating multitudes, hitherto unseen and inert for most of us and in any case obliged, in order to reach us, to borrow the language of words, too symbolic and too inaccessible for the many, what good is there in pointing out the mistakes of form and the sometimes shocking clashes of colour that, with varying degrees of success, the unceasingly complex enlargement and enrichment of this new language are bearing forward towards unheard-of prospects? From these humble beginnings, we may already look forward to the emergence of geniuses of the stamp of Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Rubens, Goya and Delacroix, who will thrust forward their internal drama to meet up with the dramas of space in the onrush of shapes and movements, by means of symphonic forms of expression capable of driving the combination of art, music and the spoken word ahead into an ever-receding future.

The pitfalls of colour

In this respect too a decisive effort needs to be made to re-incorporate into the territory of visual harmony the ground lost through the onslaught of colour films. It is not enough to have integrated this great discovery into the total expression of life that cinema promises to be, only to imagine that nothing can be done about it. On the contrary, this achievement demands fresh efforts to maintain it. "Nature" is in itself by no means harmonious, as the existence of painting, an art of elimination and selection, amply demonstrates. "Black and white", with its spontaneous, profound harmonies of silver and velvet, turning, appearing and disappearing and with its volumes in movement, had spoilt us, because it acts as the interpreter of "value", not colour; but the mechanical recording of colours is fraught with the risk of grave miscalculations, especially as regards "location" filming, which gifted and well-intentioned film-makers are powerless to arrange in an orderly fashion. The total visual symphony requires them to organize premeditated harmonies of increased complexity by means of the concerted movements of form, whereby contrasts and reflections are constantly brought into play in chiaroscuros, half-

Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (United States, 1927) is considered to be one of the first gangster films.

tones and violent lighting and in ever-changing relationships.

A broad, united effort needs to be made, and it is to be expected, as indeed we may foresee from cartoons or even the simplest films, that the film director of the future will play a role more akin to that of the orchestral conductor than to that of the painter. The slightest works of Disney or his imitators require the work of numerous teams of artists, teams that will have to be strengthened for the great orchestral works of the future. Legions of set designers, dancers, costumiers, extras and technicians of every kind will certainly be recruited too. These circumstances restore the cinema, which is still a prey to various kinds of financial and show-business skulduggery, to its rightful place in the domain of regenerated communities, and show up clearly its necessary contradictions with the obstinate individualism in which our age, in spite of the directions in which it is irresistibly headed, remains regrettably bogged down.

VI. THE MISSION

The cinema thus awaits a completely renewed social terrain. True, it has not yet fulfilled the promises that architecture, in times past, kept in relation to the mass of believers, but that is because its social bases and the mystical impetus that can only spring therefrom are still in the process of formation, and it took architecture several centuries to attune itself to the emerging sentiments of which it was, ultimately, the expression. I know of no worse aesthetic prejudice than that of thinking that, once the instrument has been discovered, the masterpiece will follow of necessity and at once. It is strange that so many disgruntled people should criticize the cinema for not having, by the age of forty, produced the definitive masterwork, when it is carrying out within itself the complex and difficult task of developing its resources, while those same critics find it quite normal that Christians should have waited a thousand years to fulfil the poetic mission promised by Christianity. If the capital which the cinema needs more than any other art, given its gigantically complex organization, were to remain in the hands of businessmen or groups of businessmen having no other aim, in securing control of it, than the pursuit of their own interests, unless capital were to become entirely social, the cinema would soon join the ranks of the most degenerate illustrated periodicals, sentimental stories and so-called "popular" fiction. It would vanish altogether as an art form. The weakness of the cinema is a function of its greatness.

Two dangers

The fact that cinema is and can only be a collective art, that it lives and develops and can only live and develop by appealing constantly to the unanimous voice of the crowds, requires from all who play a part in organizing it a continuous effort to assimilate its advances, and constant involvement in using to good effect the revelations it brings. Though we are far from having reached that situation, though we even seem to be getting farther and farther away from it, we are well aware that history is full of unforeseen but predetermined reversals. The origins of Christianity, for example, have shown us how a dual spiritual process seemed, at times

when society was in total anarchy, to lift the wills and souls of some to precisely the same extent as the wills and souls of others declined. The history of early Christianity bears many similarities to the events leading up to the society of the present.

The unspeakable depths to which certain film-making enterprises have sunk, the philistinism and vulgarity of the "producers" and retailers of images, the desperate efforts some firms have to make in order to keep American cinema up to the level of the inventiveness of its directors and the prodigious resources in personnel, equipment and technology they have at their disposal, the development of Russian cinema, conscientiously struggling to remain collectivist and to ward off the temptations of dialogue and the star system, the undeniable progress made by French cinema in recent years, should all warn us against taking the sombre view towards which a superficial examination of the question would seem to incline us. Although the cinema is at present adrift between two shoals, those of private interest and of its permanent partner, plutocratic demagogy, these two shoals will sooner or later be submerged by the irresistible rise of societies towards collective forms of production that subordinate private interest to the general interest and gradually push plutocratic demagogy from the plane of sentimental abstractions, having "idealistic" education as its instrument, towards the plane of human realities, the means to which is psycho-physiological education.

Freedom of expression under threat

An immense task is being carried out, of which economics is the starting point and trade unionism, whose goal is to remake man by means of his functional aptitudes and his real interests, will be the main organ. This should ultimately dispel the dangers that threaten the cinema by re-integrating its freedom of expression, so firmly cast in the mould of its mechanical resources, into a society solidly built around the strict harmonic organization of its production. Everything is interconnected, in disorder as well as order. This freedom of expression, constantly hindered and dissipated by today's social chaos, is threatened not only by the financial skulduggery and the public bad taste which it creates and which serves its purpose in a continuing process of give and take. The state, its police and its censorship

The cinema is and can only be a collective art.

act in the service both of this skulduggery and of this bad taste, thus maintaining the feeble-mindedness and exaggerated sentimentality that they need in order to function.

The cinema is tending to become, like the press and radio, an instrument of domination and mindlessness in the service of big business and of the sham political bodies that represent it in government. The state, almost everywhere, is but a pale reflection of the oligarchies that have gradually taken over the organizations and individuals capable of influencing public opinion and making use of the outdated abstractions whereby it can so easily be misled for purposes that are totally unconnected with the public interest and are indeed increasingly contrary to it, in all fields. Helped on by mental laziness, the world would very soon be on the way to perdition unless an underground movement of progressive organization, brought about by the concentration of capital and labour and by the power of machines more and more rapidly imposing unity upon exchanges among different peoples and on those peoples' reflexes, acted automatically to construct a new order among the general anarchy. The cinema, the unwitting victim of the legal disorder, is one of the most effective instruments of the emerging real order.

The perfectly attuned orchestra

If this legal disorder were to persist, a possibility that in my opinion the organic growth of all the elements of the real order should rule out, two schools might well emerge within the movement that draws the cinema and society itself towards their destinies. One of these schools would address itself to the elite and the other to the amorphous mass of the majority of spectators, and there is no doubt that, in the present state of uncertainty, a split is appearing that could have deplorable consequences for the society that is emerging as well as for the cinema. But the cinema cannot be untrue to its historic destiny. No art is more involved with the multitude, its needs, its impulses, its joys, its sufferings and its deeds. It feels its real presence. Itself a language of movement, it partakes of the movement of the crowds that impart their movement to it. Great political crises are a function of the inner movement that prevents societies from dying and manifests itself in commotions and demonstrations. There is a profound logic in the evolution of the arts. It was natural that the reign of painting, now in decline, should have coincided since the Renaissance with the reign of the individual to whom it gives expression but who is now gradually joining the increasingly vast and urgently required organizations that collective needs are constructing.

What is a crowd in turmoil? It is the hubbub of the assembled orchestra before the symphony begins. The art of the great ages is a totalitarian art. Mistakes, it is true, may occur here and there, but the mosque, the pagoda or the cathedral together express the great emotional and lyrical depths that only the enthusiasm of crowds is capable of stirring. And the cinema must be mosque, pagoda and cathedral all rolled into one, a mosque, a pagoda, a cathedral expanded out to the ill-defined limits of living, dead or yet unborn humanity, out as far as the telescopic or microscopic infinities of form and movement—the perfectly attuned orchestra, a thousand instruments strong, of sensibility and intelligence and of the multitudes in action. ■

1 *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), an American film directed by Fred Niblo, which signalled the birth of a new kind of cinema hero, played by Douglas Fairbanks. (Ed.)

2 *Underworld*(1927), directed by Josef von Sternberg. Two gangsters, old friends, become rivals for the love of the same woman, a story-line that was to become familiar. (Ed.)

3 I refer only for the record to those silent documentaries (wildlife or travel films), some of them very lovely, the commentaries of which are nearly always pointless, often dim-witted, sometimes execrable and meant only as a sacrifice to the fashion of the "talkies", and whose only effect is to exasperate those spectators who like to think that they go to the cinema to see and appreciate beautiful images. (Ed.)

4 *Hallelujah!* (1929), an American film directed by King Vidor, was the first film with an all-black cast. It was rapturously received by the intelligentsia in France, where it is regarded as the first historically important talking picture. (Ed.)

5 *New Year's Eve* (1923), a German film directed by Lupu-Pick with a screenplay by Carl Mayer. It is typical of a school of cinema (*kammerspiel*) that entrusts the whole meaning of the film to the power of the images and the use of light. (Ed.)

6 Antoine Louis Barye (1796-1875), French artist. One of the leading sculptors of the 19th century, he established animal sculpture as a major genre. (Ed.)

Egypt through the looking-glass

by Magda Wassef

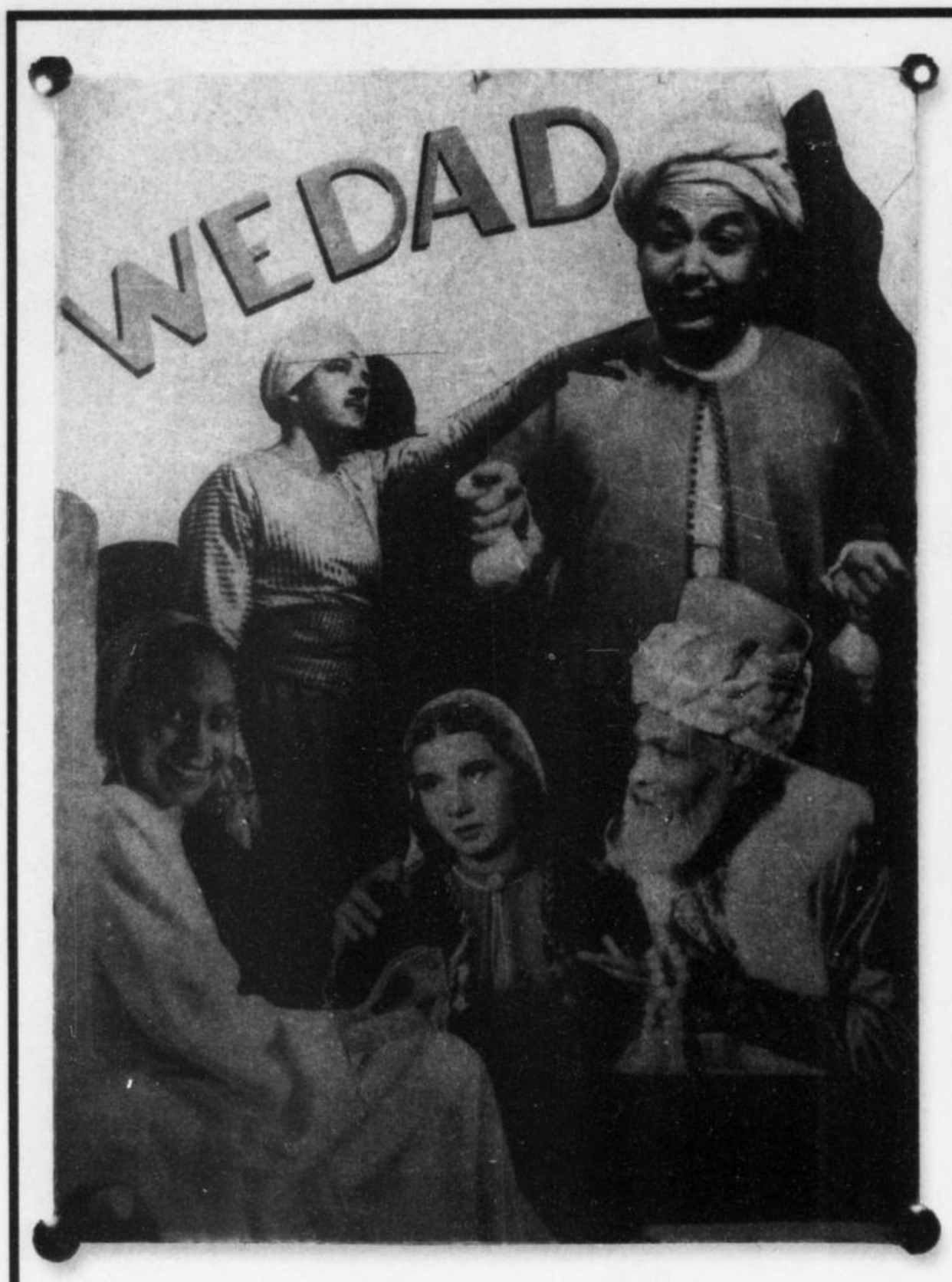
Omar Sharif and Faten Hamama in Salah Abou Seif's psychological thriller *No Sleep* (Egypt, 1957).

The development of Egyptian cinema has followed the vicissitudes of a nation's life

Magda Wassef is an Egyptian film and theatre specialist. She is the author of several studies on cinema including one, written for UNESCO, on "The cultural heritage in Arab cinema".

Egyptians have been film fans ever since 1896 when the first Lumière shorts were shown in Alexandria, only a year after their projection in Paris. By the turn of the century there were several cinemas in Cairo and Alexandria, mainly showing American and European films.

The first entirely Egyptian film was *The Civil Servant* (1922), a short feature directed by Mohamed Baoumi. In spite of the prevailing climate of misogyny, however, the real pioneers of Egyptian cinema were women such as Aziza Emir, Assia Dagher and a few others. The tenacious



Misr Studios

Misr Studios, known as "the Hollywood of the East", were the first fully equipped modern cinema studios not only in Egypt but in the Middle East and Africa. Opened in 1935 on the Avenue of the Pyramids in Giza, less than fifteen kilometres from Cairo, they were the brainchild of Talaat Harb, director of the Misri Bank, the first wholly Egyptian bank. Since 1917 a number of studios had been built in Egypt, but their resources were extremely limited. Talaat Harb sent Ahmed Badrakhan and Maurice Kassab to France to study directing and Hassan Mourad and Mohamed Abdelazim to Germany to study photography. The first film made at Misr Studios was *Wedad*, starring the great singer Umm Kulthum (at centre of poster above). It was a smash hit and was shown at the 1936 Venice Film Festival. Although *Wedad* was co-directed by the German Fritz Kramp, the studios' technical advisor, and Gamal Madkour, Misr's next feature, *Al hall el akhir* ("The Last Hall", 1937), was made by an Egyptian, Abdel Fattah Hassan. Most of the important films made in Egypt between 1935 and 1955 came from Misr Studios. Between 1936 and 1960, when the studios were nationalized, 182 features were made there. ■

Aziza Emir was both producer and leading lady of Egypt's first full-length feature, *Leila* (1927), which was a smash hit and launched the Egyptian motion-picture industry. Notable among the dozen or so films made in the late 1920s was Mohamed Karim's *Zeinab* (1929), an adaptation of Mohamed Hussein Heikal's novel, the first in Arab literature.

Early musicals Egyptian talkies of the early 1930s were strongly influenced by popular love songs. Mohamed Karim's *The White Rose* (1933), starring the great singer Mohamed Abdel Wahab, entranced a vast public both in Egypt and abroad. It made the name of the Egyptian cinema and introduced it to a new genre, the musical. Every film-maker had his own singing star. Mohamed Karim, for example, directed all Mohamed Abdel Wahab's films, and Ahmed Badrakhan directed five of the seven films starring the famous woman singer Umm Kulthum. Kamal Selim's *Determination* (1939) signalled a move away from these light-hearted productions. By showing the life of Cairo slum dwellers, Selim brought a new, more realistic atmosphere to Egyptian cinema.

Escapist films During the Second World War packaged Hollywood-inspired musical comedies were all the rage. Films, studios and cinemas proliferated. The actress-singer Leila Mourad became Egypt's Mary Pickford in *Egypt's Sweetheart*, a role recreated by Togo Mizrahi in *Leila* (1942), the first in a series made over a ten-year period. Singer Farid El Atrash and dancer Samia Gamal were a famous double act.

Following in the footsteps of Kamal Selim, Ahmed Kamel Morsi (*The District Attorney*) and Kamel El Telmessani (*The Black Market*) set out to deal with contemporary problems. Both these films were shot in 1943, but neither was shown until 1946 because of a tacit form of censorship. In 1947 a censorship code—along the lines of the Hays Code in the United States—was officially introduced. Many subjects became taboo, and as a result specific references to real-life situations tended to disappear. Puritanism and conservatism were the pretext for this.

The revolutionary ferment of the 1940s was stifled by increasingly repressive measures that affected all aspects of cultural life. Only musicals, comedies and melodramas were given free rein.

Years of paradox New archetypes emerged after the Nasserite revolution in 1952. Patriotic films such as Rodda Kalbi's *Give Me Back My Heart* celebrated the revolution and railed against the old social values.

Yet a few talented film-makers continued to explore a realist vein. Among them were Salah Abu Saif, who took the side of the most underprivileged, especially women, in *The Leech* (1956) and *I Am Free* (1959); Henri Barakat, director of the classic *Song of the Curlew* (1959); Atef Salem, one of whose best-known works is *We Students* (1959); and Kamal El Sheikh, who made *Life or Death* in 1954. Youssef Chahine showed an instinctive concern for contemporary problems in films like *The Nile's Son* (1951) and *Cairo Station* (1958).

But important though they were, these films were only a drop in the ocean of Egyptian cinema. With an average output of sixty movies a year, the industry continued to satisfy the escapist desires of the mass public and meet producers' and distributors' demands for profitability. A change of course only came at the beginning of the 1960s.

A cinema revolution After 1961 the state exercised almost complete control over the cinema. The size of the private sector was considerably reduced. For the first time film-makers were free from the restrictions imposed by the external market that had previously held sway.

Ideology began to infiltrate into scripts and lead them into unexplored territory. One favourite theme was the world of the peasantry, which featured in Tewfik Salah's pioneering *The Heroes' Struggle* (1962), Salah Abu Saif's *The Second Wife* (1967) and Youssef Chahine's *The Earth* (1969). Yet most of these films only attracted a limited public, compared with that of films which gave comic treatment to serious subjects such as the population explosion and the equality of the sexes.

Youssef Chahine's *Central Station* (Egypt, 1958). The director plays a newspaper vendor, and Hind Rostom a fruit-juice salesgirl.

Mohamed Karim's *Vive l'amour* (Egypt, 1938), a musical starring singer Mohamed Abdel Wahab and Laila Mourad.

Mohamed Khan's *The Wife of an Important Man* (Egypt, 1988).

Kamal El Sheikh (*The Thief and the Dogs*, 1962) and Salah Abu Saif (*Cairo 30*, 1969) were among a number of film-makers who were sympathetic to the social insights of Naguib Mahfouz (Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1988) and adapted several of his works to the screen. But the ideals and structures of Nasserism collapsed with defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967.

Rejection and renewal The tension was relaxed by success in the war of 1973. Nasserite protectionism was replaced by the economic liberalism of Anwar El Sadat. The State Broadcasting Authority, hitherto responsible for production and distribution, was dismantled, and there was a return to the law of the market-place. Shadi Abdel Salam, who had directed *The Mummy* in 1968 in exceptional conditions, tried for fifteen years to make *Akhenaton*, but in vain.

Kamal Selim's *Determination* (Egypt, 1939), the first major Egyptian realist film.

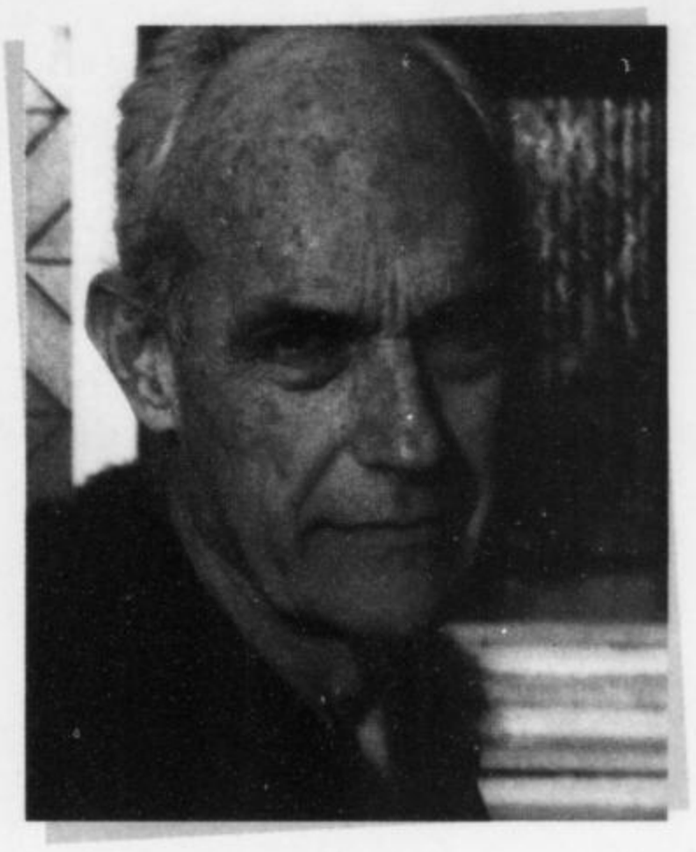
Ali Badrakhan's *El Karnak* and Mamdouh Shukri's *The Dawn Visitors*, both made in 1975, harshly criticized the excesses of the Nasser regime. A new generation of film-makers, trained at the Cairo Film Institute, came on the scene and showed with uncompromising realism the explosion of free-wheeling capitalism in a society where social climbing has become an ideal.

Violence and mockery After the sensational assassination of Sadat in 1981, violence became the keynote of the first half of the 1980s. Some twenty films that came out in 1983 alone ended with the murder of a corrupt person. On screen popular justice exacted revenge in Samir Saif's *The Monster* and Saad Arafa's *Marzouka*. Discontent also gave rise to mockery, a favourite Egyptian form of expression whose symbolic figure in cinema is the actor Adel Imam. A typical film in this vein was Raafat El Mini's *The Lawyer*. Some films took on the subjects of sex and drugs. Actress Nadia El Guindi became their muse after appearing in Hossam El Din Mostafa's *El Bateneya* (1980).

Several directors brought new life to the cinema during these years. Among them were Atef El Tayeb *(The Innocent)*, Raafat El Mini *(The Last Love Story)*, Mohamed Khan *(The Wife of an Important Man)*, Khaïri Beshara *(Bitter Day, Sweet Day)*, Mounir Radin *(Days of Anger)* and Hani Lashine *(The Puppet Player)*.

In the 1990s the Egyptian film industry is again in thrall to a paradox. On the one hand, output is declining (barely twenty films were made in 1994) and unemployment is rising. On the other, film quality and viewing facilities are improving (cinemas are being renovated). Satellite has revolutionized the audiovisual landscape (for worse rather than better).

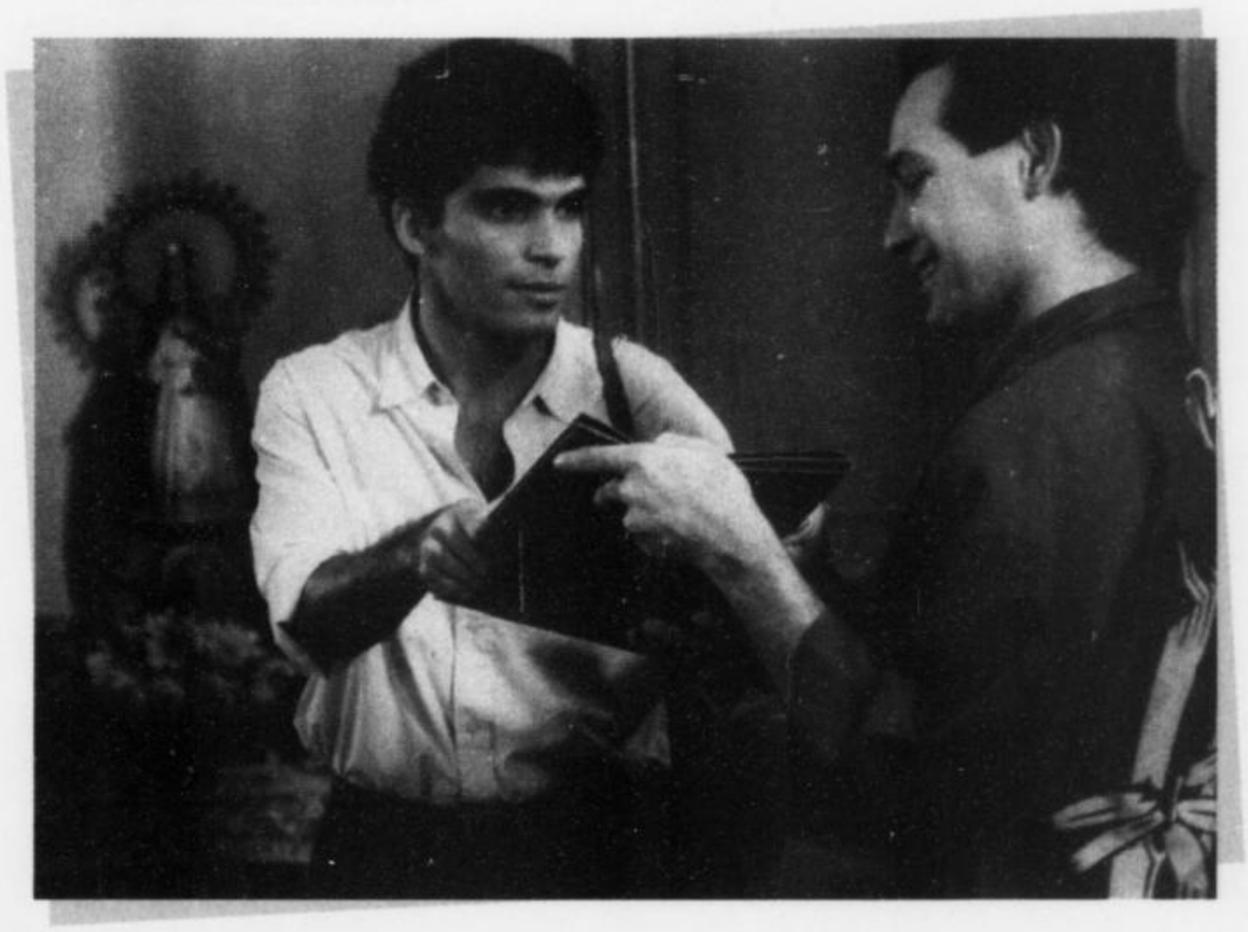
Fortunately a director of the quality of Youssef Chahine is still making films. Others, including Mohamed Khan and Atef El Tayeb, who emerged in the 1980s, are continuing to show their originality. Bright new talents such as Sherif Arafa, Yousry Nasrallah, Asma El Bakri and Khaked El Hagar are showing great promise. ■



Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, whose film *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994) won the Silver Bear award at the 1994 Berlin Festival.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Strawberry and Chocolate* (Cuba, 1994), starring Jorge Perugorria as the artist (right) and Vladimir Cruz as the student.



▸ Your latest film, *Strawberry and Chocolate*, tells about an encounter between a homosexual intellectual and a member of the Cuban communist youth movement. Where did you get the idea of looking at the problem of homosexuality in Cuba?

— I read Senel Paz's* original story in manuscript. What I wanted to show in the film, and what I believe, is that the problem is broader than just homosexuality. It's the idea of tolerance and accepting other people. Basically the film is the story of a youth, David, who learns to become a man by transcending his limited vision of reality when he comes into contact with a social outcast.

▸ Were you surprised by the film's success in Cuba?

— I sincerely thought people would like it because it's a moving human story with a fair share of humour, and because I was satisfied with my work. But its success went beyond my expectations.

▸ But your film is pretty hard on life in Cuba. At the end your hero, Diego, even decides to emigrate. Weren't you afraid of being labeled an "enemy of the revolution"?

— To my mind a society can go forward only if it is aware of its errors and failings. Criticism is an ideal revolutionary weapon.

▸ How do you see your work as a film-maker in a nationalized system compared to your colleagues in Europe and the United States?

— Each system has its pros and cons.

Riccardo Larrain's *La frontera* (Chile, 1991).

But I would like to say that Cuban cinema isn't a typical "state-run" cinema. It is true that to make films you have to go through the government-controlled Cuban Film Institute. But the Institute is run by open-minded creators, not by civil servants. It is not like some other bureaucracies with which it is more difficult to work. Here the state monopoly on production may tend to limit creative development, while under a capitalist regime there is a risk that producers who are only interested in profits will go for sex-and-violence formula movies. On the other hand, it is true that the absence of a monopoly encourages the existence of independent directors and producers.

◗ Is there a crisis in the Latin American cinema?

— Latin American cinema is in a state of permanent crisis because it is not in control of distribution. Our films are seen less in Latin America than in Europe and even in the United States!

Cuba is an exception to the rule with its Latin American Film Festival and our San Antonio de los Baños film school, which takes students from all over Latin America. In addition, the Cuban revolution has always insisted on the importance of close cultural ties with the rest of the continent. In Cuba you can see films from Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela and other Latin American countries, but we are virtually the only country in that position because the major distribution circuits are controlled by transnational companies linked to the interests of Hollywood producers.

◗ But doesn't a fascination with Hollywood also enter into it?

— It's true that American producers have substantial resources at their disposal, but they also know how to make attractive films and sell them admirably. Good films, important films, are also made elsewhere, but no one can see them. When someone tells me that if a film hasn't been successful it's because it isn't commercial, I say, "Start by showing it in normal conditions."

This doesn't mean competing with Hollywood in special effects. We've got to offer something else, another kind of cinema that doesn't depend on violence, special effects and the sensational. Let's take advantage of streamlined technical equipment to make inexpensive quality films. That can be done anywhere.

◗ Which film tradition do you belong to?

Luis Puenzo's *The Official Story* (Argentina, 1984).

***Barravento* (*The Turning Wind*, Brazil, 1962), the first feature film by Glaúber Rocha (1938-1981).**

— Our cinema is the heir of Italian neorealism. After the war we in Latin America saw films shot with rudimentary equipment, sometimes even on worn-out film stock, films like *The Bicycle Thief* or *Open City*, which broke away from the Hollywood productions we had got used to. It was a revelation, and we took to it very quickly. It enabled us to solve the problem of our still faltering film industry, i.e. how to make films with the resources at our disposal that expressed our personality yet still strove for the universal. So neorealism was the starting point for all of us. This doesn't mean that we are making neorealist pictures today. That was a moment in the history of the cinema, a productive episode which has led on to other things.

Fernando Solanas's *El Sur* (Argentina, 1988).

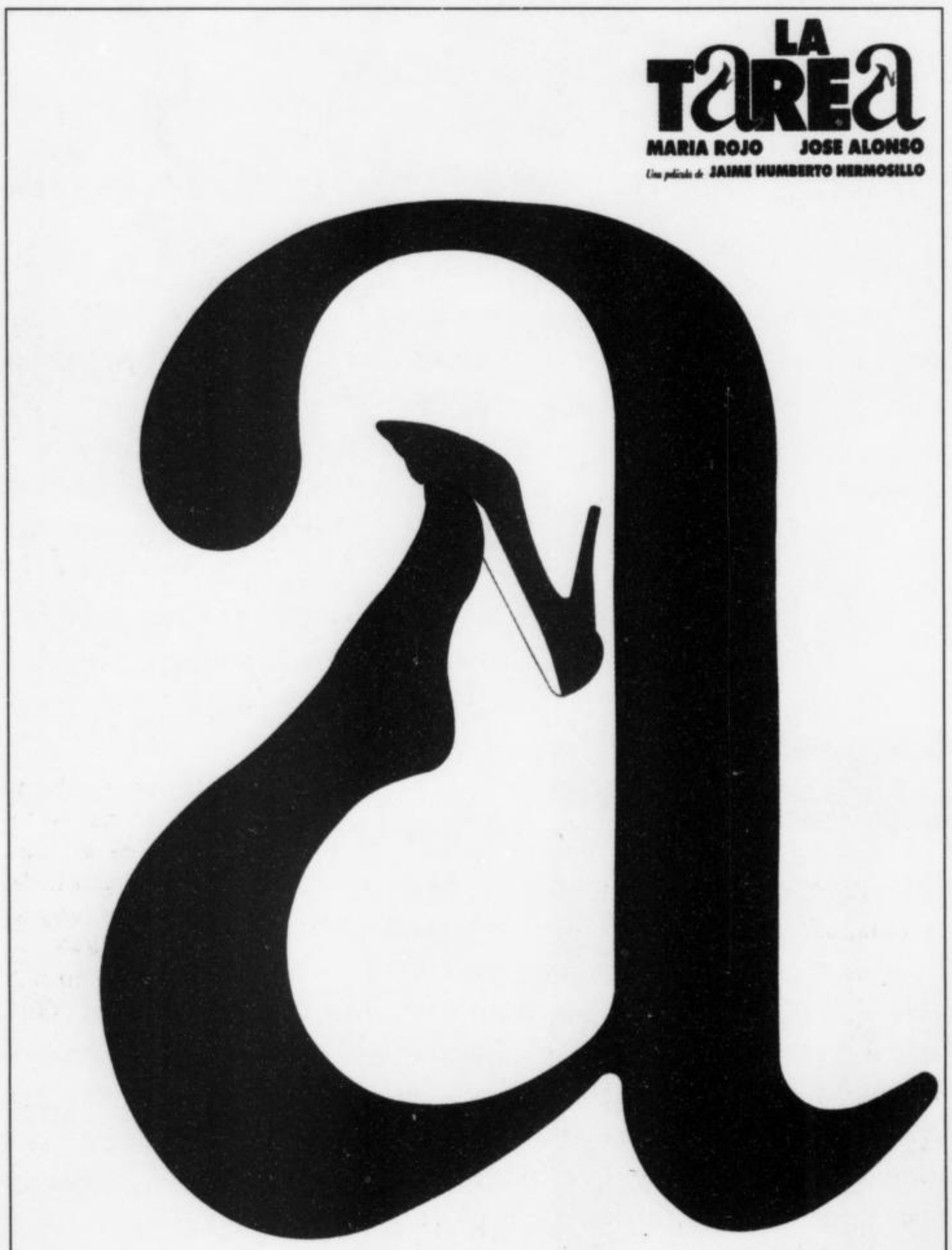
As for me, I think I am making more analytical films, but I don't deny my debt of gratitude, or my admiration, for my neorealist teachers. I have also been influenced by other film-makers such as Luis Buñuel, to whom I feel close in so many ways, and Jean-Luc Godard with whom I find it harder to identify but who has given me several keys to cinematic expression. ■

* *El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo* ("The Wolf, the Woods and the New Man"), winner of the Juan Rulfo Latin American Short Story Prize, 1991.

Mexican melodrama:

by José Carlos Avellar

Nostalgia for traditional melodrama is having surprising effects on Mexican cinema today



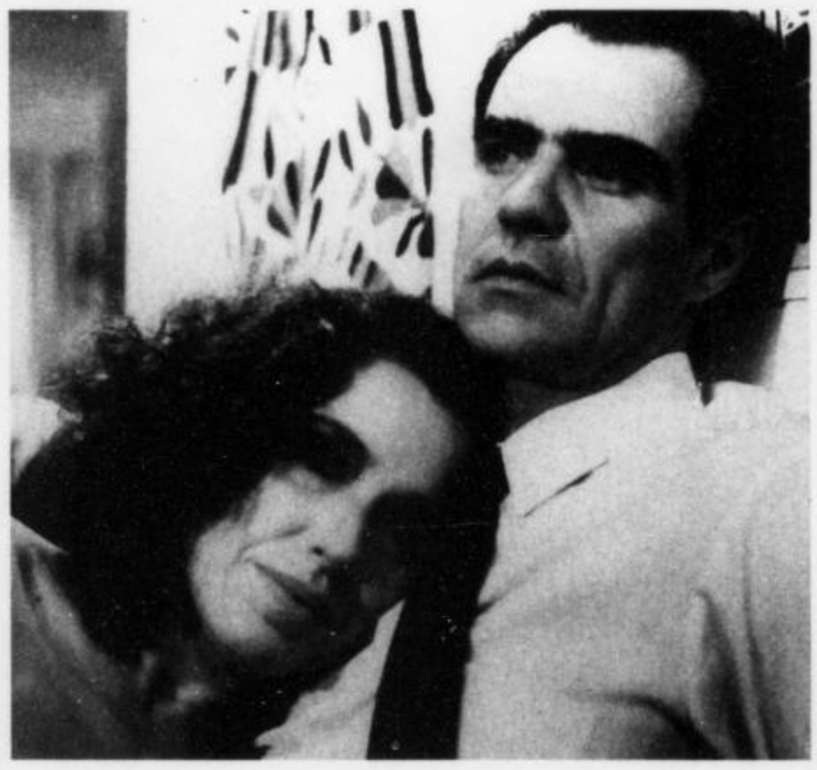
Right, María Rojo and José Alonso in Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's *La Tarea* (*Homework*, Mexico, 1990). Above, a poster for the film.

Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's film *La Tarea* (1990, *Homework*) is a good starting point for a look at modern Mexican cinema. The viewer's first reaction is whether the film really is "cinema": it consists of a single shot from an immobile camera that films two characters who talk incessantly and sometimes disappear off-screen. It seems more like a piece of theatre or television than a motion picture.

However, as a result of the skilful use of a simple set and a dramatic construction that fits into the solid tradition of studio filming, the viewer soon realizes that the immobility is deceptive and that the film has a dynamic of its own.

The set consists of an apartment with corridors, a front hall and a bathroom adjacent to the room we see through the camera's eye. Off screen but integrated into the action, the viewer imagines the existence of a half-open window through which shadows and noises sometimes penetrate from the street outside. In other words, the setting is not limited to what can be seen on the screen. The outside world has not disappeared.

The viewer is immediately presented with a conundrum: why is the camera in this specific



the remake

Dolores del Rio and Pedro Armendariz in a scene from Emilio Fernandez's *María Candelaria* (Mexico, 1943), a melodramatic treatment of peasant life.

spot? At the start of the film we see a woman put a video camera under the table, facing the entrance door. We don't know why she does this, but it is a way of getting us interested in what she is up to. We have been let into what is clearly a secret to the man who now enters the room and is invited by the woman to sit down on the carpet. We smile at her efforts to keep the man in the frame and at the man's awkward movements as he tries to remain natural. Gradually we become accomplices in a game between the two characters, each of whom seems to be hiding something from the other.

Part of the secret is revealed about halfway through the story. Virginia, a student of cinema, is making a film with her former boyfriend, Marcelo, who doesn't know what is going on. She has hidden the camera under the table to comply with her teacher's insistence that she should make a film using a single camera angle, cinéma-vérité style. As the subject of her film, she has decided to get Marcelo to talk about the problems in his love-life. When he notices the camera, he loses his temper and storms off. But there is a twist in the story. Marcelo comes back. He has decided to play himself and to act as if he does not know he is being filmed.

Yet it is only at the end that the whole truth comes out. Virginia's real name is not Virginia, but Maria. Marcelo is actually José, her husband, who is helping her make a film for her cinema class.

Eloquent tears The question raised by this film and what interests me here is that cinema is not *what* is seen but *the way in which* it is seen. The viewer discovers the point of view of the person behind the camera, i.e. either the director or an invented character. The showing of a film is an occasion in space and time for an encounter between the perspectives of the director and the viewer.

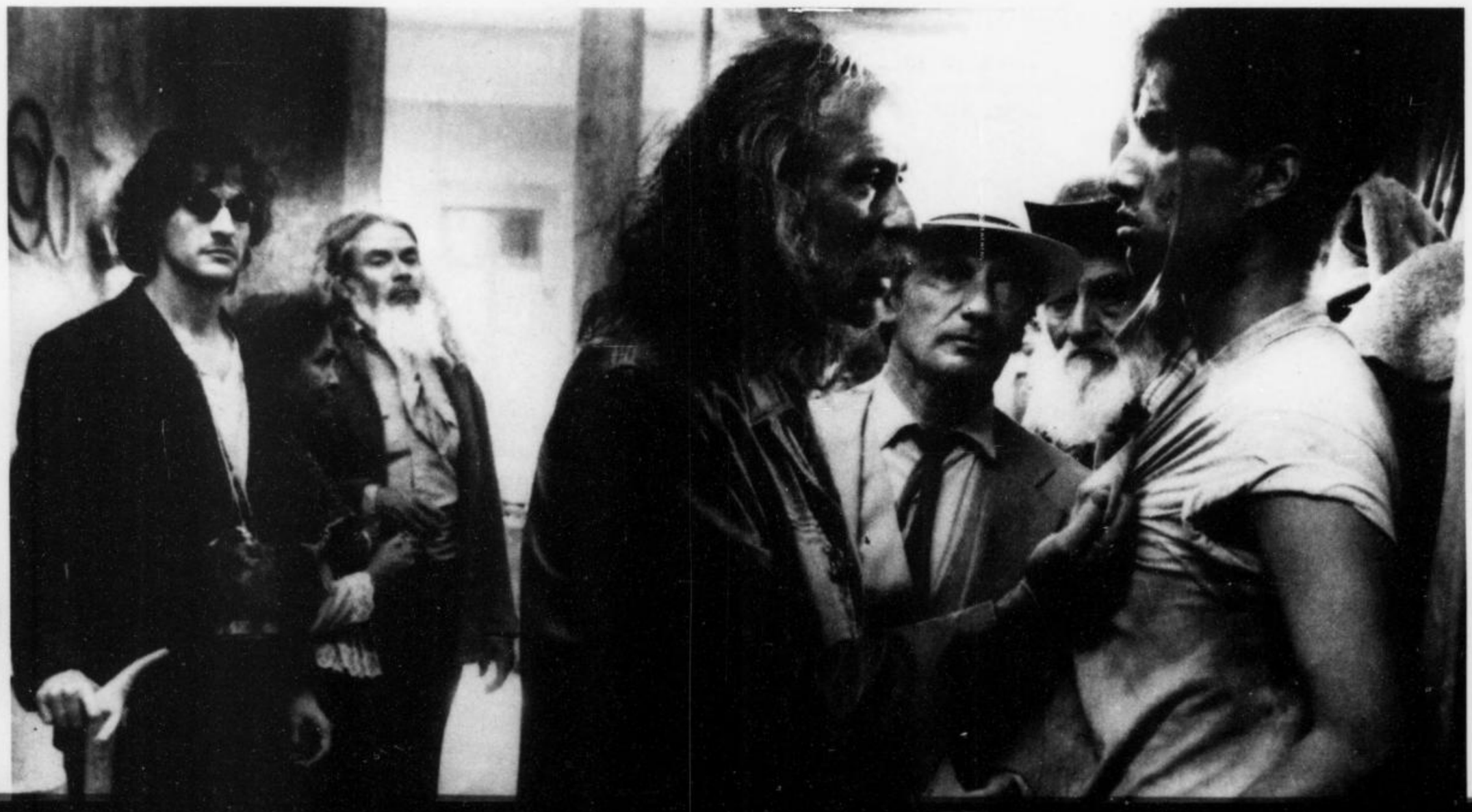
La Tarea is entirely based on this relationship. The camera is in fact caricaturing the point of view of a specific viewer in the history of the Latin American cinema, the person who saw the melodramas made by Mexican film-makers between the mid-1930s and the late 1950s. These melodramas brought to the screen a popular narrative style that Mexicans have always loved and that is reflected in political cartoons in the newspapers, in radio serials, popular songs and music, in national holidays such as 2 November (the day of the dead) and in the grandiose tragic style of mural paintings. A good story has to be a tear-jerker.

The major studios (where the Mexican film industry was born) were ideal places for making these film melodramas. There it was possible to create the kind of private world, tenuously connected with what is going on outside, that is evoked by the small room in *La Tarea*. In this magical setting demigods, prisoners of a tragic destiny, suffer life's misfortunes on behalf of the viewer, who watches what happens on screen like Hermosillo's watching camera, without really sharing in the characters' suffering. The viewer is present at a ritual in which crying becomes a pleasure.

The road to realism Then, in the early 1960s, Mexican cinema changed. Under the influence of television news, documentary films and Italian neorealism, film-makers tried hard to cut loose from the narrative style of the studios. New ways of storytelling appeared. Film-makers went out into the streets with hand-held cameras, to film what they saw, to look critically at social problems and transmit images from real life. All subjects, even non-realistic ones, were treated in documentary style. Shooting was done out of doors, in daylight.

But films made in this period are far from escaping the "grammar" of studio film-making, which abandons the straitjacket of visible reality for the realm of the imagination. Films may have been shot in natural settings, but the framing and the photography in black and white (softening lines with filters) tended to produce images that were closer to dreams than reality.

Today we are witnessing a return to Mexican melodrama but in a revamped form enriched by new cinema languages that have appeared in Latin America since the 1960s. Mexican film-makers are analysing melodrama of the 1940s and 1950s with eyes that have



Jorge Fons's *El callejón de los milagros* (Mexico, 1994), based on *Midaq Alley,* a novel by the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfuz.

Arturo Ripstein's *La reina de la noche* ("The Queen of the Night", Mexico, 1994).

seen militant films, Brazilian *Cinema nôvo*, Argentine *Tercer cine*, Cuban *Cine imperfecto* and Bolivian *Cine junto al pueblo*.

Old wine in new bottles Melodrama is blooming again. In Alfonso Arau's *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (1991, *Like Water for Chocolate*), young Tita cannot marry Pedro because tradition says that she must stay at home and look after her mother, and so Pedro marries Tita's sister in order to be near his beloved. In Dana Rotberg's film *Angel de Fuego* (1992, *Angel of Fire*), set in a circus, a father and his daughter hide their incestuous love. The narrative style has changed radically, however. Francisco Athié's *Lolo* (1993), the story of young working-class children on the fringes of society, is a blend of classic Mexican melodrama and Italian neorealism. Fernando Sariñana's *Hasta Morir* (1994, *To the Death*) adopts an expressionist approach to a similar theme.

This, then, is no return to past forms but a sort of constructive, creative criticism of the old melodramatic principle through films that differ widely in style and inspiration. Such films include documentaries like Arturo Ripstein's *Principio y fin* (1993, "Beginning and End"); science fiction like Guillermo del Toro's *Cronos* (1993); political essays with militant overtones like Jorge Fons's *Rojo amanecer* (1989, *Red Dawn*) and *El Callejón de los Milagros* (1994, "Miracle Lane"); and cartoons like Carlos Carrera's *El Héroe* (1994, "The Hero") in which a young woman who wants to kill herself pretends that the man who saves her has attacked her; when he is in the hands of the police, she calmly prepares again to take her life. Other examples are comedies like Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's *La Tarea* described above and *Intimidades en un Cuarto de Baño* (1990, *Intimacy in a Bathroom*). The melodramatic structure, a distinctive way of looking at the world, varies from one narrative style to another.

"We didn't do it on purpose," said Arturo Ripstein about his latest film. "We didn't say, 'Now we're going to make a melodrama', as if we had to, but we are all children of our time and place, and we all belong to a generation which was brought up on and fed by the cinema and whose lives are shaped by cinematographic images." These films are indeed the fruit of almost half a century of Latin American cinema.

This reworking of studio melodrama reflects the feeling, very strongly held in Latin America, that political, economic and cultural life is melodramatic by nature. The current state of the cinema is ample proof of this. It seems clear that the market for films is increasingly restricted to products from the major audiovisual industries, to films that resemble video games and vice versa. The production and above all the distribution of our films meet so many obstacles that we fear we may, tragically, become foreigners in our own land. In such circumstances a return to melodrama also reflects a desire to make closer contact with the public by using a familiar, albeit reworked, language. It speaks of a certain nostalgia for the days when the Mexican cinema felt at home in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. ■

José Carlos Avellar, Brazilian cinema historian and critic, is secretary of the International Federation of the Cinematographic Press for Latin America. He is a board member of Riofilme, a Brazilian film distribution company. Among his published works are *Le Cinéma brésilien* ("The Brazilian Cinema", Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1987).

Nagisa Oshima

Japanese director Nagisa Oshima (right) won an international reputation with *In the Realm of the Senses* (1975). Many of his films, such as *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1982) and *Max mon amour* (1986), have a compulsive, disturbing quality.

▸ At this year's Cannes Film Festival you presented a work entitled *100 Years of Japanese Cinema*. Has the cinema really existed in Japan for a hundred years?

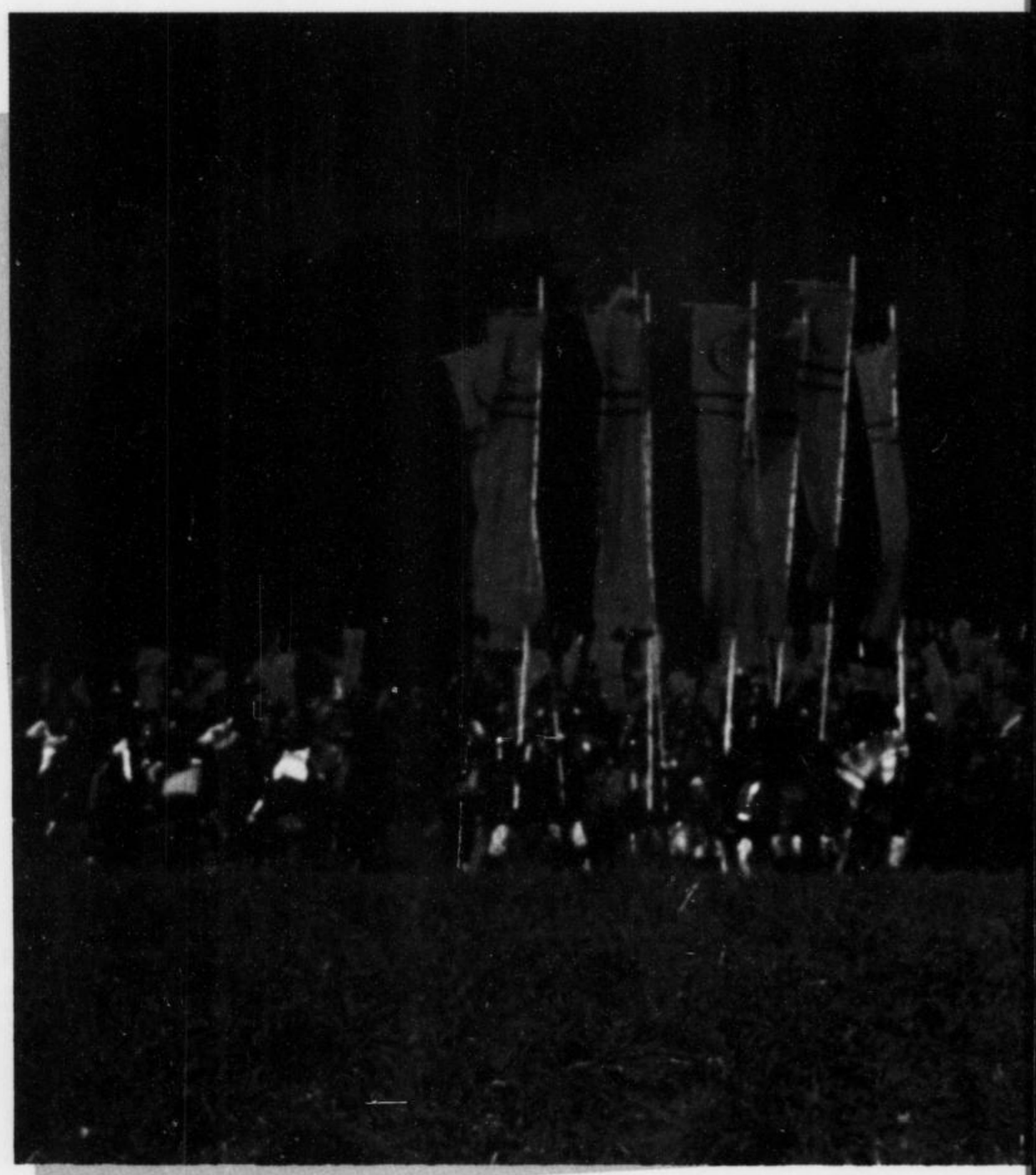
— Yes. At first French technicians went there to shoot documentary footage. Then the Japanese, with their usual appetite for things from abroad, ordered cameras and began filming, *Kabuki* theatre to start with. Production soon diversified, and the history of the Japanese film industry began in earnest.

▸ What is the leitmotiv of this history?

— I think Japanese directors have been trying to get closer to freedom in the last hundred years. In any case that's how I see it.

▸ What do you mean by "freedom"?

— The greatest barrier to development in Japan has always been our family system. The very special power bestowed upon the father is a throw-back to feudalism that was enshrined in law even after Japan was opened up in the Meiji period. The power of the father has permeated the Japanese social fabric, spreading into business



and even the army. Presidents of companies used to have, and sometimes still have today, exhorbitant power that turns their employees into children, devoid of any responsibility, of any adult feelings.

Any rebellion against this deeply entrenched system was regarded as extremely, intolerably evil. The most varied examples of this rebellion have long been portrayed in Japanese cinema. Even during the Second World War our cinema dealt with oppression by fathers both within and outside the family.

Nagisa Oshima's *The Ceremony* (Japan, 1971).

◗ Did the law change after the war?

— The old system was abolished. All the members of a family now enjoy equal rights, as they do in the West. But the system is so old that it has

Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* (Japan, 1985), a Japanese version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Akira Kurosawa's *Rhapsody in August* (Japan, 1991).

survived nevertheless. For fifteen to twenty years the Japanese cinema continued to struggle against out-moded attitudes. It was only after 1960 that a new generation of film-makers, of which I am a member, sought to make a different kind of film, with the break-up of the family as a backdrop. But at that time the film industry was starting to decline.

Because of television?

— The rise of television in Japan had a lot to do with it, as it has every-where else. In *100 Years of Japanese Cinema*, I included a scene from a film of the period where you see an entire family sitting round a big table watching TV. They no longer have a centre, a focal point; conviviality has gone. The television set was more than a match for the father figure.

The feudal code was wiped out?

— Precisely. A generation of young people emerged without any land-marks. They were utterly lost; they didn't even know who to fight. They were no longer confronted by a wall. They even found it hard to communi-cate because opposition is a basic form of communication. More and more, and this is the case in Japan today, you see young people turned in on themselves, in a kind of autistic condition. And naturally this attitude is recorded in modern Japanese cinema.

Did your film *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976)

Yasujiro Ozu's *I Was Born, But...* (Japan, 1932)

Akira Kurosawa's *Kagemusha/The Shadow Warrior* (Japan, 1980)

Yuko Tanaka in *Onimaru* (Japan, 1987), Yoshishge Yoshida's version of *Wuthering Heights.*

provoke sharp reactions in Japan?

— No. Nor did *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1982). We were expecting violent reactions from Japanese ex-servicemen. But films, works of art in general, don't have a big effect on Japanese society. I think Japanese society is devoid of reaction. The only hardnosed response came from the police. The film was shot discreetly in Japan, but it was edited and post-produced in France. Its producer, Anatole Dauman, was French.

To show the film in Japan therefore, we had to import it. And then the Japanese customs got in on the act. They demanded and obtained cuts, which also partially explains the indifference of the public. This attitude on the part of the customs officials was absurd, a real abuse of power, because it had nothing to do with them. But that's how it was. Even the book, with photos from the film, was banned. But I sued them; it lasted seven years, and I won in the end.

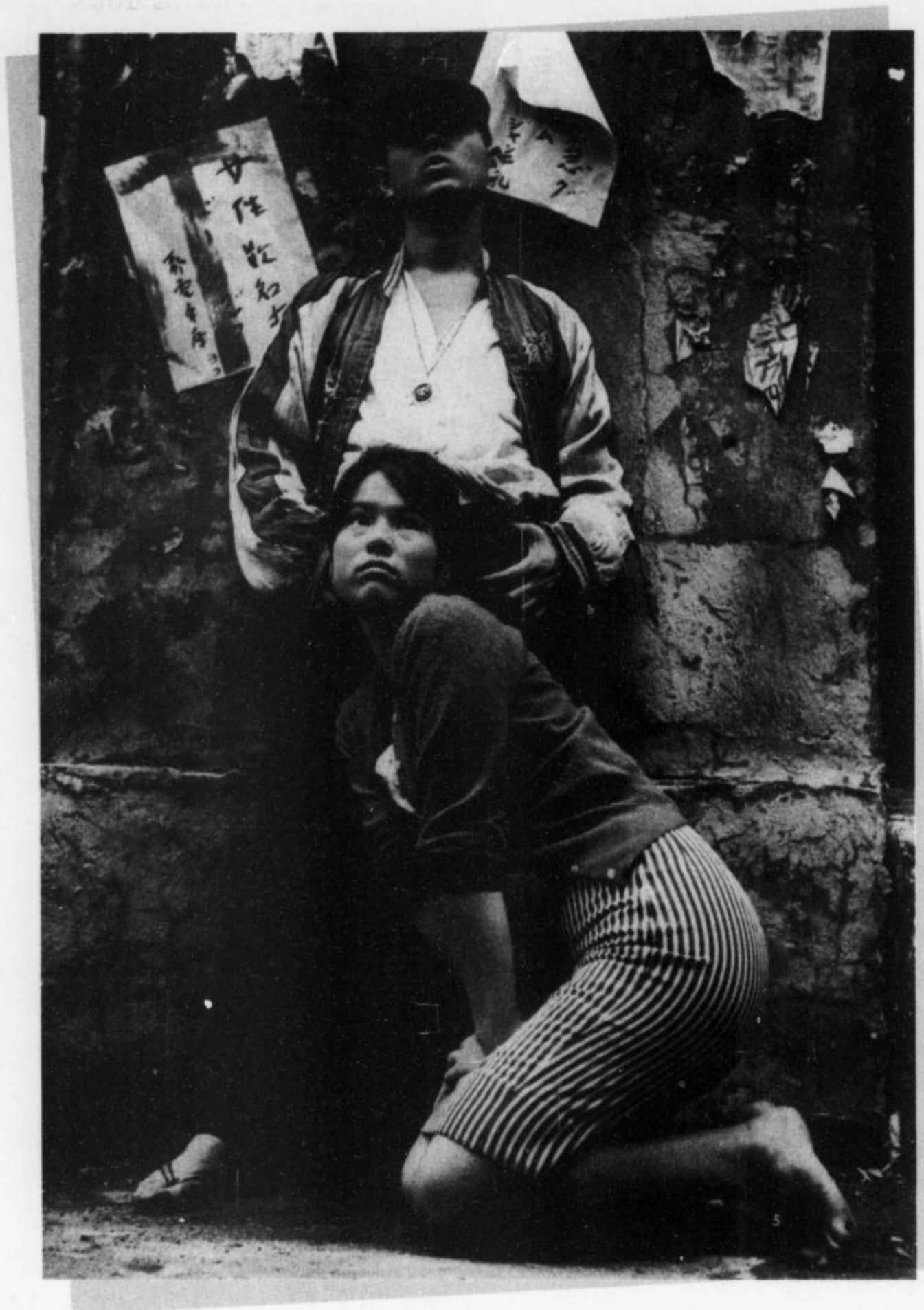
Are the Japanese puritanical?

— They weren't at first. There was great freedom of expression. But with the arrival of Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity things changed, at least superficially. Deep down, society is still not shocked by sex. I think it is interesting that it was women above all who defended *In the Realm of the Senses*. Women accounted for 60 per cent of the box-office receipts.

Is the censorship changing?

— It is changing for the better, it is becoming more liberal, if you don't push it too hard. Things are changing slowly but surely. On the other hand, any overt rebellion immediately brings a reaction, an exaggerated oppression.

Should the cinema violate taboos?



Shohei Imamura's *Hogs and Warships* or *The Flesh Is Hot* (Japan, 1961).

— That's a question I am often asked. I think that a film, like any work of art, is not made for a specific reason. A work of art is made without any kind of certainty. It is produced in fear, apprehension and doubt. It isn't a purposeful, deliberate undertaking that knows exactly where it is going. It doesn't want to "express" anything. It is always possible that it may, incidentally, offend certain taboos, but that is not the aim.

▸ After defeat in 1945, how did Japan receive the American cinema?

— Very well. There was a kind of hunger for it, even! We were hungry, literally hungry. And American movies were more than just movies. They were like food. That lasted for a long time. Even if we were opposed to the United States and the Americanization of Japan, we were passionately keen on American films. It is true that they showed us things that for us were incredible. Scenes of victory celebrations, for example.

▸ Is the Japanese cinema facing problems today?

— It's going through a difficult period, but I'm an inveterate optimist. A critic once said something to me that pleased me very much. He said, "You are the only Japanese to talk simultaneously of Japan, the whole world and yourself." It's true that for a long time our great film-makers talked of nothing but Japan. Japanese films seemed focused inwards on Japan. It's also true that young film-makers today talk only about themselves. But that too will pass. The world is immense. A synthesis of one kind or another is always possible.

▸ Are you contributing to it?

— I hope so. After *Max, Mon Amour* I worked for more than four years on a project that didn't come to anything. It was about California in the 1920s and the relationship between the Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa and Rudolph Valentino. It was a complicated story, involving their wives. The film was called off one month before we were due to start shooting. At present I am still hosting my programme on Japanese television almost every day. I talk with my guests about culture, politics, society, even the sects. I am living completely in the present. And of course, I'm already thinking of another film.

▸ How do you get on with American film technicians?

— Excellently. I have often worked with my old friend Mirek Hondricek, a Czech cameraman, both because of his great talent and because we know one another well. But American film crews are remarkable. I would also mention Americans' love of the cinema and their willingness to lend a hand. To shoot the huge demonstration scene in Washington for *Hair* I appealed through the press for unpaid extras. Thousands of people turned up, all dressed in period clothes and all full of enthusiasm. Thanks to them the scenes are really convincing. I wonder if you'd find such enthusiasm in other countries. ■

The famous Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni (at left, with Federico Fellini) has appeared in over 80 films. He has received Best Actor awards at the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals.

interview

Marcello Mastroianni

What is your first memory of the cinema?

— The first film I can remember seeing was *Ben Hur*.* My family and I were living in Turin, where we had emigrated from southern central Italy. It was in about 1930—I must have been six at the time. The images of that spectacular film made a great impression on me. I've never forgotten it. I think it must have been dubbed into Italian. Foreign films were never released in their original version in Italy. They were always dubbed.

When did you decide to make a career in the cinema?

— It wasn't something I consciously decided to do. After living in Turin, we moved to Rome. My grandfather had six sons, all of whom lived in Rome. When I was young, between ten and fifteen, say, there wasn't much spare cash to keep us amused. We were short of money. We made our own toys—slings, for instance.

At that time the place where young people got together wasn't the local dance hall but the church. We weren't particularly attracted by religion. We went there because the local parish had a football pitch and we had to sing in the choir. There was a little theatre in the basement of our church in Rome. The priest wrote Christian plays. That's where I first began to act. I continued to do so at school, then at university, where I studied architecture. We did amateur dramatics and put on American and Italian plays. We weren't all that bad.

Chance had a hand in what happened next. We put on *Angelica*, a play by an Italian anti-Fascist author, Leo Ferrero. I got the part of Orlando, and Angelica was played by Federico Fellini's wife, Giulietta Masina. It was particularly nice of her to take part in our production as she was already a star. Critics and theatre people took the trouble to come and see the play. One of them was the general manager of the largest Italian theatre company of the time, whose director was Luchino Visconti. He came to see me after the show and asked if I'd ever thought of turning professional. He was looking for a leading man.

It was shortly after the war. I was twenty-six. My father had gone blind,

and I had to support my mother and the rest of the family. "I have responsibilities," I told the man. "How much were you thinking of paying me?" He told me I first had to see Mr. Visconti. I knew Visconti, but wasn't in the habit of going to the theatre. We preferred to go and see films with Gary Cooper and John Wayne. I liked acting in plays, but not going to see them. I discovered real theatre when I joined Visconti's company. My career took off quickly. The first play I acted in was Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and the second, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

At first I didn't dare tell my mother I had given up my office job. It would have sent her into a panic. I continued to leave home every morning at 7.30, as though I was going to the office. But after a month I took the bull by the horns and told her the truth. She was very happy. That was when I really started my career as an actor. I invited my father to the show. We gave him a special chair. He was very moved to hear his son acting in a play. That's how I started my career—in the most traditional way imaginable.

Marcello Mastroianni with Nastassia Kinski in Alberto Lattuada's *Stay as You Are* (Italy, 1978).

How did you come to meet Federico Fellini?

— I had already played in a Visconti film, *White Nights*, which was based on a Dostoevski short story, with Maria Schell, who was a European star at the time. And during the ten years I spent with Visconti's company I'd had occasion to work with Fellini.

One day somebody came to tell me that Fellini wanted to see me in Rome. He had already made some wonderful films. So I went along. He was on the beach with his scriptwriter, the author Ennio Flaiano. He told me he wanted to make a film with Paul Newman. So as not to steal the limelight from the American actor, he needed some pretty ordinary-looking guy to play alongside him and had thought of me. I replied that I was ready and willing, but ventured to ask if I could glance at the screenplay. He said that was perfectly possible and called to his scriptwriter, who was lying under another parasol. He gave me a folder. When I opened it, all there was inside was a drawing—Fellini was always drawing things—which depicted a swimmer whose penis went right down to the bottom of the sea. And there were lots of women swimming around it, like in an Esther Williams aquatic movie. I went crimson with embarrassment and said: "Yes, it looks very interesting. Where do I sign?"

After that I never asked Fellini for a screenplay. I made five films with him. There was a great bond of friendship and complicity between us. Fellini was not just a great director, but a true artist. If he hadn't been a filmmaker, I think he would have been a great writer.

Working with him was constant fun and games. Everything was turned into a lark or a joke. He liked to work on actors in the same way he would have worked dough. You had to come before him like a naked child, and then he would have fun with you. He used to have enormous fun, even with the bit actors he would go and choose in the streets of Naples. The Neapolitans are a way-out lot, even to look at, and they have a very peculiar mentality. If they couldn't say their lines, Fellini didn't care. He'd say: "Come on now, say one, two, three. Laugh now! Laugh!" Then he post-synched them. It was extraordinary: with Fellini it was cinema non-stop.

Fellini was demanding, but he never lost his phenomenal sense of humour. It was a tremendous privilege to work with him, even greater than the privilege of appearing in films that have gone down as masterpieces in the history of the cinema. I have to admit that I felt jealous when he made films in which I didn't appear.

Did you have an equally friendly relationship with any other Italian director?

— There was certainly friendship, but never the same complicity that existed between me and Fellini. We were like schoolboys or army pals who couldn't stop playing the fool. I've had many director friends—Ettore Scola, Marco Ferreri and many others I've worked with and greatly liked. But there was something unique between me and Fellini.

Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (Italy, 1960).

Has your work with non-Italian directors enlarged your experience?

—No. But I'd like to say something that women directors may find a bit silly. I find that women in that profession, which has always been a man's profession, feel somehow grateful to male actors who agree to be directed by them and have confidence in them. So women directors tend to adopt a maternal, protective attitude towards them. That's my feeling anyway.

Every time I've worked with a woman director, even if we weren't friends, and even if it was just for one film, she has looked after me like a mother and cared about details that would not have occurred to any male director.

People sometimes say that the cinema isn't what it used to be. What do you think?

— Yes, that's true. But I remember my mother always saying that the world wasn't what it used to be. It's true: the world changes, people change, times change, and one can't go on doing things the way they were done in the past. Nowadays, there might no longer be a slot for a guy like Fellini. People always say things were better in the old days, but only when they are forty or fifty years old.

Even young people who are interested in the cinema say the same thing. They think the cinema has less freedom than it used to have.

— Look at Russia, where I've shot two films. When film-makers there could not express themselves freely, they made good films. Ever since they've been free, they have failed to produce anything of note. Perhaps it's because of the Americans. In the old days, when I went to work in what used to be the Soviet Union, I was welcomed—and I'm not being big-headed—like a star. Why? Because the authorities didn't allow American films in. It was above all the Italian cinema that people were familiar with, because of its social concerns. Now all they go for are American films. The competition is very stiff. It must also be said that the conquest of a freedom for which they were not prepared created a kind of vacuum. Before, they were forced to make an effort to put across certain ideas through the medium of film. They had to work hard to fool the censors.

But there's a crisis everywhere—in Italy and Germany too. I think we need to be vigilant about the dangers of television. Even stars no longer have the same aura. They've lost their stature, as Fellini used to say. In the old days, you'd see a giant Marilyn Monroe on a cinema screen; nowadays she's a tiny figure on television. Going to the cinema was a kind of enthralling religious ceremony: the lights would go down, the spectators would enjoy the showing together, then they would come out and have a drink and talk about the film.

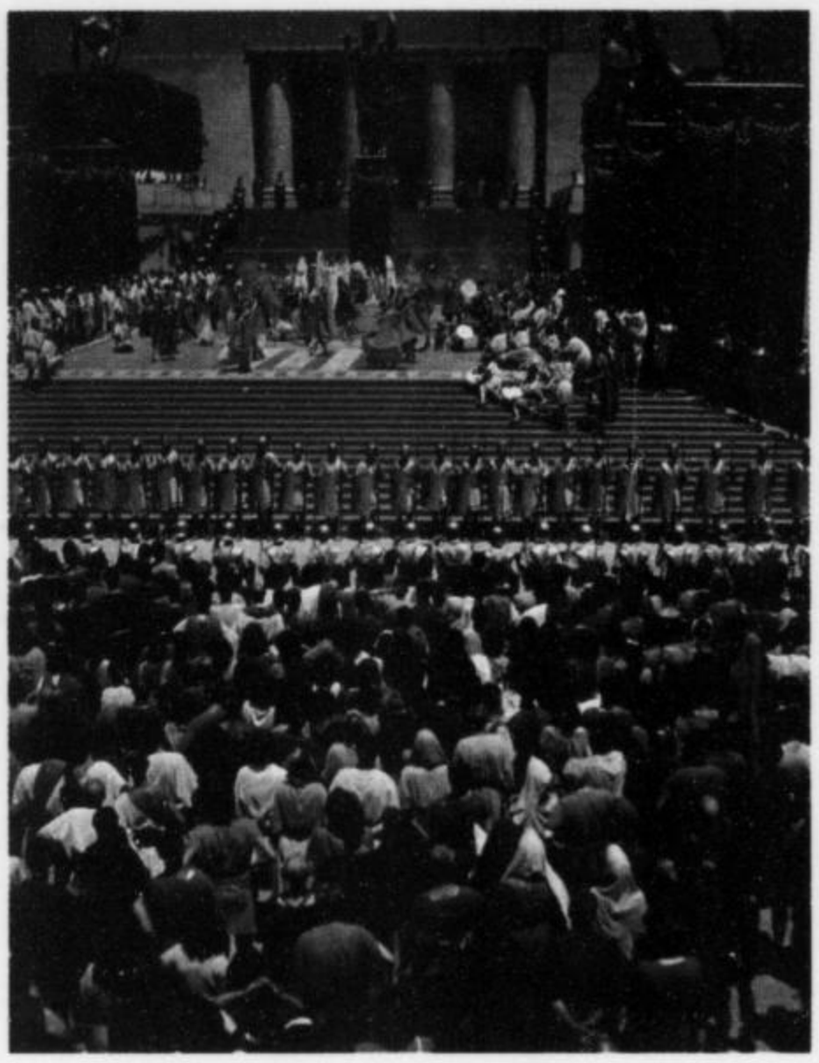
Television is a wonderful invention, but it fosters loneliness, prevents people from going to the cinema and encourages them to stay at home. Because of television, people read much less than they used to.

Do you believe in the future of the European cinema?

— Of course I would like to. I'd like there to be a European cinema. But are governments going to do anything to help that wonderful idea of a European cinema? There are home-grown films that fail to get released because the cinemas are full of American movies. It's unfair. But it's also, in my opinion, unfair on the American public. Just think how many fine European films they have been prevented from seeing. I find this cultural compartmentalization regrettable in a world that has become so small. ■

* *Ben Hur* (1925), an American film directed by Fred Niblo, which contains some spectacular sequences and is one of the most famous films of the silent era. *(Ed.)*

Mussolini's statement that "cinema is the strongest weapon" dominates the inauguration of Cinecittà in 1937.



The U.S director Mervyn LeRoy's blockbuster *Quo Vadis?* (1951) being shot at Cinecittà.

Cinecittà

by Francesco Bono

The roller-coaster history of the legendary Italian studios

During the night of 26 September 1935, a terrible fire destroyed the Rome studios of Cines, then Italy's biggest film company. It was immediately decided to build a new "cinema city" called Cinecittà.

The creation of Cinecittà was part of a wide-ranging plan to promote the Italian cinema implemented by the Fascist regime from the beginning of the 1930s onwards. To encourage production, it was decided in 1931 to institute a state subsidy system whereby all Italian films would receive a 10 per cent bonus on their takings. In 1932 the Venice International Film Festival was established; it remains one of the most important such events in the world. In 1935 the film school, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, went into operation. The cinema was intended to promote the image of the regime both at home and abroad. Mussolini proclaimed the cinema to be "the strongest weapon".

After building work lasting a mere 475 days on a site near Rome, Cinecittà was inaugurated by Il Duce on 28 April 1937. Italy's replica of Hollywood was intended to mark the beginning of a new era in the Italian cinema. Between 1937 and 1939, some sixty films were made at the studios by some of Italy's finest directors and actors, from Alessandro Blasetti and Roberto Rossellini to Alida Valli and Vittorio DeSica. At the

Francesco Bono, an Italian film critic, is a specialist in the cinema of northern and central Europe. Among his published works are *Dansk Film* (1993, "Danish Film") and (as co-editor) *Nordic Television—History, Politics and Aesthetics* (1994).

beginning of the 1940s, over 100 films a year were being made in Italy.

With the fall of Fascism in 1943, film production came to a halt. German troops smashed and looted the studios, which were bombed by the Allies the following year. At the end of the war, the only place where films could be shot was in the streets: this marked the beginning of the unique period of neorealism.

Hollywood-on-Tiber But Cinecittà rose from the ashes and became a veritable legend, which from 1951 on spread from Italy throughout the world. With the help of a favourable exchange rate and cheap, high-quality labour, the Americans took over Cinecittà. The studios became an ideal place to shoot the superproductions with which Hollywood was trying to answer the challenge of television. The first director to come to Cinecittà from the United States was Henry King, who shot *Prince of Foxes* there with Tyrone Power and Orson Welles. Two years later Mervyn LeRoy made *Quo Vadis?* with Robert Taylor and Deborah Kerr.

By the mid-1950s Cinecittà swarmed with big international stars like Gregory Peck, Rock Hudson, Ava Gardner, Elizabeth Taylor, Kirk Douglas, John Wayne, Audrey Hepburn and Jennifer Jones. Their high jinks, brawls and love affairs were the talk of the town. But American film-makers also gave Cinecittà a strong sense of professionalism and organization. It took Joseph L. Mankiewicz two weeks to shoot the triumph scene in *Cleopatra*. The chariot race in William Wyler's *Ben Hur* required three months' work. The Egyptian port of Alexandria was entirely reconstructed in Torre Astura, a few kilometres from Rome.

In all, Hollywood companies produced twenty-seven films at Cinecittà between 1950 and 1965, including such spectacular and unforgettable movies as Charles Vidor's *A Farewell to Arms*, William Wyler's *Roman Holiday*, Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* and King Vidor's *War and Peace*. It was the years of *dolce vita* enjoyed by top people in Hollywood on the Tiber that Federico Fellini immortalized in his 1960 film of the same name—a partly critical, partly affectionate portrait of a fleeting period of wild living.

The television era In the mid-1960s, Cinecittà suddenly woke up to the fact that it was in the middle of a crisis. The Americans had pulled out, and the reign of the superproduction was over. Ever-mounting competition from television cut directors' ambitions down to size—labour costs were by then the same as in Hollywood. An epoch was drawing to a close: sets were dismantled, and dummy forums and temples carted away. As Cinecittà's debts spiralled out of control, making renovation impossible, it entered a dark period of its history, even though a number of prestigious films were still made there, including Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969) and *City of Women* (1980), and Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969) and *Ludwig* (1972). These difficult years for Cinecittà par[illegible] coincided with a world crisis in the film industry.

An upturn came at the beginning of the 1980s following the sale of a huge piece of land owned by Cinecittà. In 1983 Sergio Leone shot *Once upon a Time in America*, and in 1987 Bernardo Bertolucci recreated the Beijing of the interwar years for The *Last Emperor* (which won nine Academy Awards). Non-Italian film-makers started coming back to Cinecittà. Johannes Schaaf's *Momo* was made there, as was Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Name of the Rose*. Fellini, who had always felt at home in Cinecittà, paid a movingly melancholy tribute to the studios with his 1987 film, *Intervista*.

Down the years Cinecittà has changed considerably. Television companies now occupy its biggest stages, from which live shows and quiz games are beamed to millions of households. And teenagers, whose knowledge of the cinema derives mainly from their video recorders, queue up at its gates in the hope of making a career in television. ■

Federico Fellini on set during the shooting of *La voce della luna* (1990).

The African cinema

by Gaston Kaboré

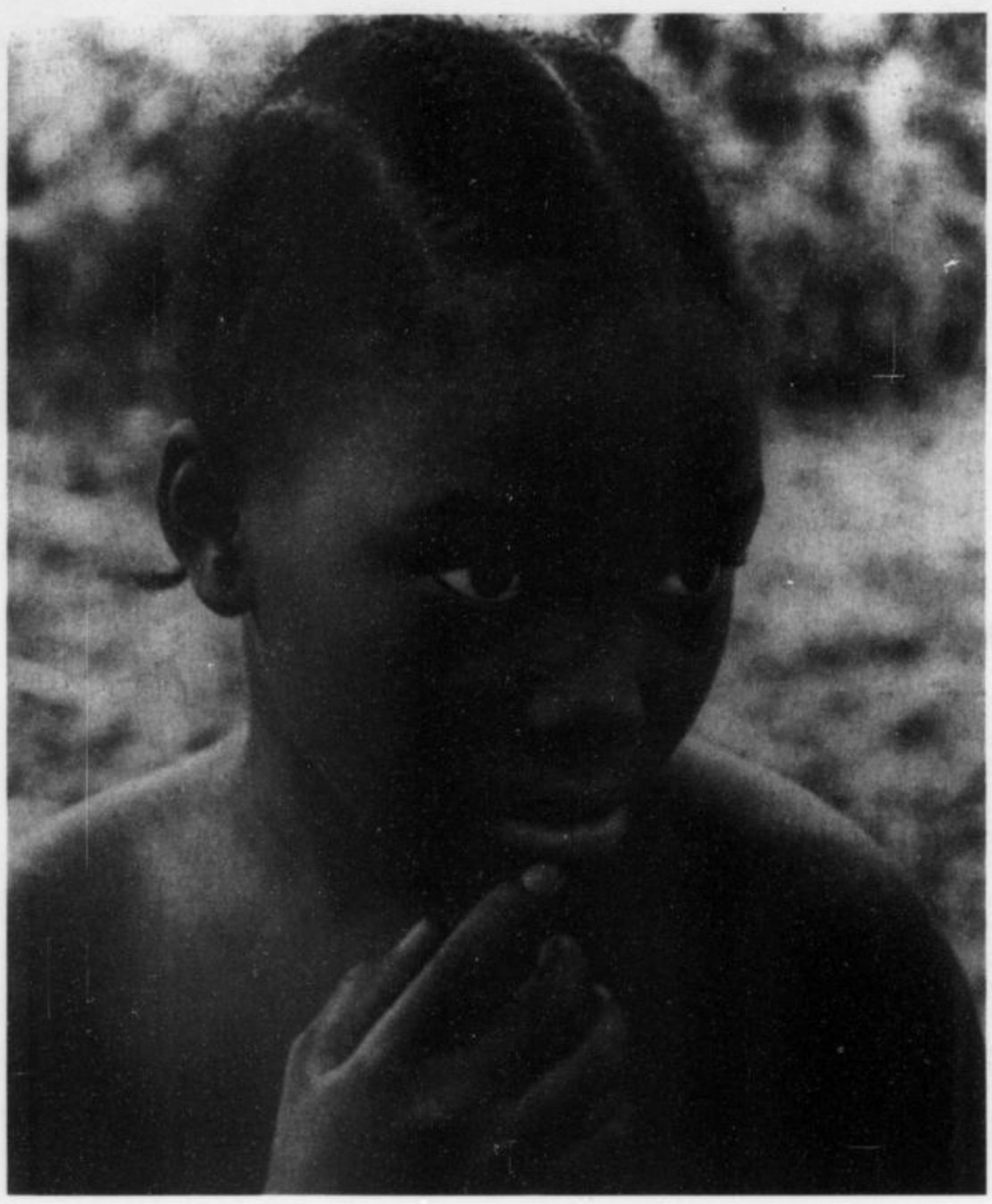
Without firm economic and cultural roots in the soil of its own continent, African cinema faces an uphill struggle for survival

In the last twenty years the number of festivals, retrospectives, film weeks and special shows devoted to African cinema has increased steadily in western Europe as a whole, and nowhere more remarkably than in France. That success needs to be set against the sad fact that it is extremely difficult to see African films in Africa.

The number of film festivals organized in Africa itself can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The hundred-odd features produced annually in African countries (including Egypt) account for less than 0.1 per cent of films released for commercial exhibition. It is the congenital fragility of the African cinema which, paradoxically, is responsible for its extraordinary success outside the continent.

in crisis

Aoua Sangaré in
Souleymane Cissé's
Yeelen ("The Light",
Mali, 1987).



A young face from Gaston Kaboré's *Wênd Kuuni* ("The Gift of God", 1982).

A cultural fashion The African film industry has no economic or cultural foundations at home, and so is under the control of people who organize events devoted to African cinema in Europe and in North America—and who, although they are convinced and sincere champions of African film, tend to live in a dream world. Only a few of them have any real idea of what is really involved in promoting such films through a festival. There is often a great deal of confusion in people's minds when it comes to concrete questions such as media impact, the creation of a real public, back-up and distribution.

African directors are of course under no obligation to respond to the many invitations they receive from abroad. But they are independent film-makers, whose isolation and lack of funding encourage them to look where they can outside Africa for the recognition they so much need. For many directors from the Maghreb or sub-Saharan Africa, an air ticket to or via Paris is often the crucial factor in their decision to take part in a festival. But the proliferation of festivals is not in itself enough to give the African cinema the commercial value it is entitled to expect.

No one knows when African films will go out of fashion. And if and when they do, what will be left of the African cinema?

Little-known, and treated like a foreign product on its own territory, the African cinema seems to have lost its way. It is in danger of yielding to the first siren voices that come from the North. Moreoever, given its financial dependence on Europe at production level, the worst scenario is to be feared—a total extroversion of a cinema with no roots of its own. That makes it all the more urgent to root the African cinema in its own soil.

Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Yam Daabo* ("The Choice", Burkina Faso, 1986).

Mirroring African society But how can that be done when Africa boasts less than one cinema seat per 100,000 inhabitants, when ticket prices produce such low returns, and when the whole of the film industry is so disastrously disorganized? Attempts have been made to remedy this situation. A welcome step was the setting up of the Consortium Inter-Africain de Distribution Cinématographique (CIDC), a common market of film covering ten French-speaking countries which was in operation from 1979 to 1985. It went bankrupt when vital economic and professional considerations were ignored under the pressure of political and administrative constraints. The CIDC raised tremendous hopes among professional film-makers in Africa. Its failure left them in a state of shock, and raised doubts as to whether African states genuinely wanted regional integration.

Few countries continue to show any interest in combining to create a single film distribution market. Yet national markets remain too small for companies to be able to cover their production costs. The only answer is to set up regional structures. The still infant African cinema has already been seriously jeopardized by the arrival of satellite dishes. Sadly, many countries will doubtless see this as a welcome excuse for doing nothing. On the contrary, the present situation makes the need to turn back the tide all the more urgent. With a multitude of images now being beamed into people's homes, it is more than ever necessary to produce endogenous images that will perform the vital function of mirroring African peoples, their societies and their concerns. ■

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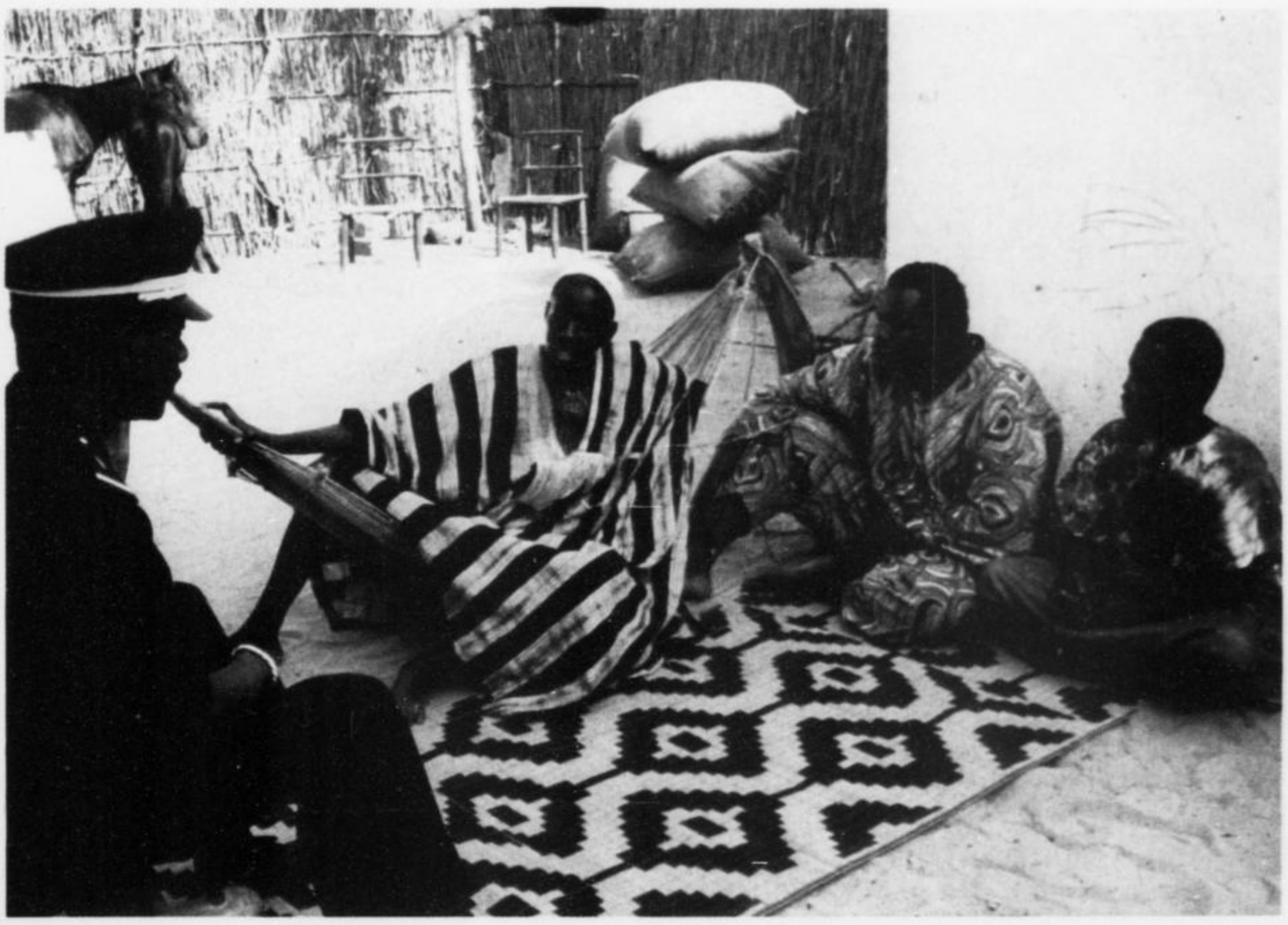
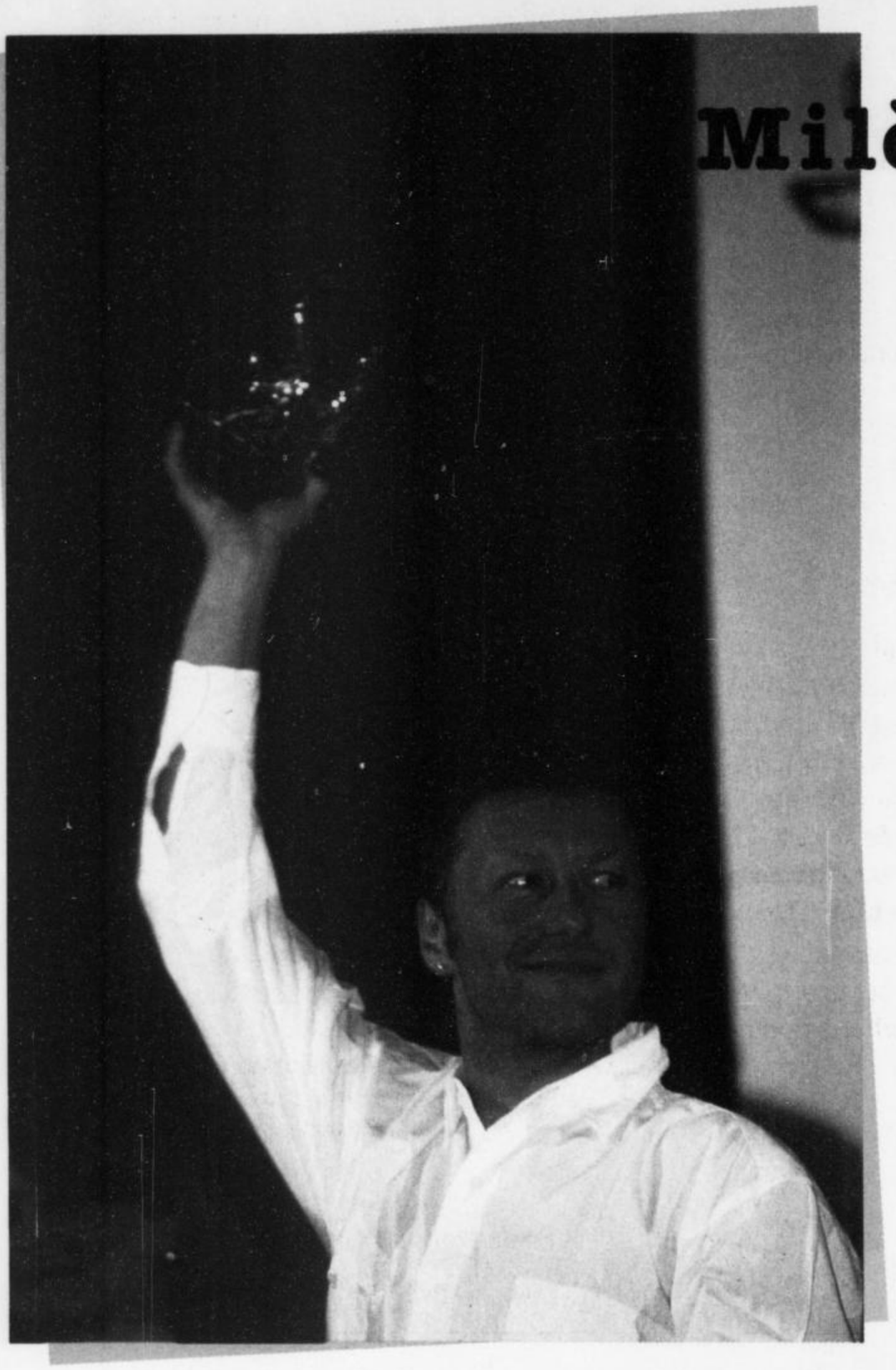
Gaston Kaboré, of Burkina Faso, is the director of *Wend Kuuni* (*The Gift of God*), which won a French César award in 1985, *Zan Boko* (1988) and *Rabi* (1992). Since 1985 he has headed the Pan-African Federation of Film Makers, a professional organization that promotes the development of the art of film and the film industry in Africa.



Sembène Ousmane's *Guelwaar, An African Legend of Africa in the 21st Century* (Senegal, 1991).

Milčo Mančevski



Macedonian director Milčo Mančevski (above). His film *Before the Rain* won a Golden Lion award at the 1994 Venice Film Festival and was nominated for an Oscar in 1995.

When you were twenty, you decided to leave your country. At the age of thirty-four you returned and shot part of *Before the Rain* there. Why did you leave? And why did you come back?

— I think all twenty-year-olds need to take off and reinvent themselves. America—the American dream—is the promised land of reinventing. It's no coincidence that in the old days people changed their names when they landed there. It answered a conscious or unconscious need to go back to square one. I left because I needed to leave. That was the first reason. The second was the cinema. And the third, which ties up with the first, was the discovery of something new—a new culture, a new way of life, a new vision. As for going back, it's something I'm always doing. I'm always schizophrenically in some halfway house.

The myth of homecoming is present in your film: Aleksandar, a Macedonian photographer living in London, decides to go back to his home village.

— The film is actually based on three mythical models: *Ulysses* or homecoming, *Romeo and Juliet* or impossible love, and *Hamlet* or self-questioning. For me the cinema is not really an art but a process of "myth-telling". My work as a film-maker has involved finding ways of telling myths in a new language, no more than that, since you can't invent new myths.

Your three myths are explored in the film's three sections, which are called "Words, "Pictures" and "Faces". Where did you get the idea for those titles?

—I have no preconceived ideas or premeditated message. When I was writing the screenplay, it became clear

that these three elements were essential. Don't forget they are the three fundamental components of any film. Take any film, analyse it, dissect it, and that's what it'll boil down to.

▸ You have said in an interview that the film grew out of a feeling...

— It was all very hazy at the beginning. After a long absence, I returned to Skopje for personal reasons. War was about to break out in Slovenia. There was a kind of pressure in the air, as when something important is going to happen or when it's about to rain. That was the feeling. The the title followed. The story came afterwards.

▸ The story is constructed around an imaginary conflict between Orthodox Macedonians and Muslim Albanians. Is that something you feel is in the offing?

— The story isn't specific to Macedonia or the former Yugoslavia. It could easily be set in Northern Ireland or the former Soviet Union or somewhere else in the world. From a pragmatic point of view the film spells out a warning. But it's not a documentary and must certainly not be regarded as one. Anyway a documentary would have had to involve politicians, given the role they play in wars. *Before the Rain* is far removed from politics. I'm not capable of talking about politics, which doesn't interest me anyway.

▸ It's a highly stylized film. The cinematography often has an unreal beauty.

— I gave a lot of thought to that problem. For a long time I couldn't make up my mind whether to opt for a more realistic, documentary angle or a stylized approach. I ended up choosing the latter, again without any rational explanation. It just seemed the natural choice—though it could be that the story itself and the characters required it. If, in the first part of the film, the images seem to come straight out of a fairy tale, it's because the hero of the story, the young Orthodox monk, Kiril, treats the real world as though it were a fairy tale. He and God are as one. Everything is beautiful. The full moon and shooting stars are shown as he sees them. I've already pointed out elsewhere that those shots were commissioned not by the Macedonian Tourist Office, but by the character of Kiril.

▸ Do you see yourself as belonging to any particular tradition?

— To many traditions, not one. I don't think I belong to a particular cinematic movement. Everything you see leaves a residue in you, especially if it's good art. A great many film-makers, artists and writers I admire are present in what I do, though I don't know to what degree. That's something for other people to decide.

▸ Is there no connection at all between what you were doing previously—your commercials, music videos, documentaries—and your feature film? Does the writer in you influence the film-maker?

— When it comes down to it, I'm a purist. I like pure art, like music, painting and perhaps poetry. Narrative film and the opera are to my mind rather hybrid forms. That's why, in all the work I've done so far, I've tried to seek out the pure element. Of all the forms you just mentioned, the one where I feel the greatest freedom is writing. When it comes to film-making, I'm an apprentice. For me, film and video are ways of broadening my writing, which thereby gains a new dimension and at the same time reaches a wider public.

I also believe video and film have virtually nothing in common. A music video belongs to the world of design and focuses on a star. A film tells a story and focuses on people. What is more, their means of expression are completely different.

As regards documentaries, I've made several, but I don't believe in the genre. I don't believe in it because it claims to reproduce objective reality, whereas we all know how difficult it is to say what objective reality is. The very act of describing that reality impinges on and alters it. However hard they try and whatever their aims, directors end up having to commit themselves.

Aleksandar's funeral, the opening and closing scene of Mančevski's *Before the Rain* (1994).

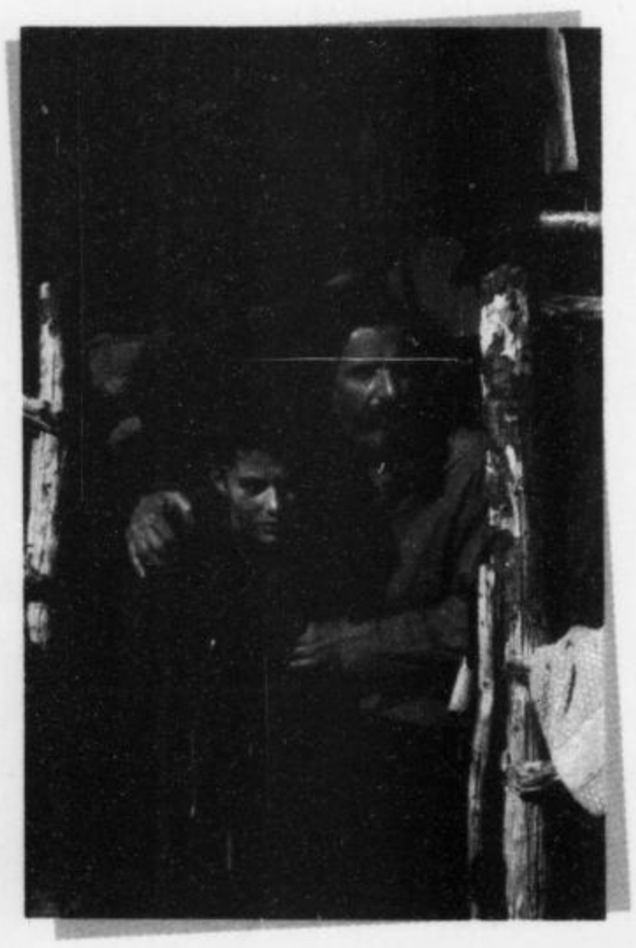
The question of commitment is one of the big issues underlying your film. Many people in the former Yugoslavia have had to face this problem.

— There are two options open to Aleksandar: either he can rejoin his cousins' "camp" by handing over to them the young Albanian woman, Zamira, who is suspected of murder, or he can continue to protect Zamira and clash with his own family. He chooses Zamira and thus signs his own death warrant.

Unlike Aleksandar, the young monk, Kiril, is incapable of taking sides. He shelters Zamira, not because he chooses to do so, but by a quirk of fate. Then he falls in love with her and leaves the monastery to go abroad with her. But he shies at the first obstacle: when he is caught unawares by Zamira's family, he yields unprotestingly to the will of the grandfather and turns his back on her. In a desperate attempt to follow him, she dies at the hands of her own brother.

Kiril does not get involved, does not act, does not decide. He is one of those people who submit. He is the only one of the three main characters who survives, but he is the most tragic. Aleksandar, on the other hand, dies, but dies with a smile on his face. He is dead, but not really tragic.

Aleksandar decides to save Zamira.



Where do you stand exactly?

— It took me a whole film to explain my position, and even then. . . . How do you expect me to sum it up in a few words? One thing is certain: no stance really stands the test of time. People like us, who grew up during the period of the Cold War and communism, have seen how revolutions can degenerate. You launch yourself into an ideal with your head full of dreams and, without your realizing it, that ideal turns into a caricature of itself. But there's nothing you can do about it, as you've already committed yourself. I've always wondered how we can define ourselves in terms of an ideology and stick to our guns when the whole world around us is changing.

You take a stand against violence...

— Yes, of course. I condemn violence, exclusion, tribalism, nationalism and everything I regard as "collective selfishness". But the problem is how can you keep on being a pacifist when someone throws stones at you? If you react, you're compromising your ideals. If you don't react, you end up getting bombs thrown at you.

One of the most violent scenes in your film—the massacre in a London restaurant—is acted in Serbian, without any translation. Is it solely aimed at spectators from the former Yugoslavia?

— On the contrary, it's aimed at everyone except Yugoslavia. I originally intended to shoot the scene in another language. It didn't matter which one, it could have been Armenian, for example. Then some technical constraints cropped up. However that may be, the scene is seen and experienced by Anne, an Englishwoman. That's why it has not been translated: Anne doesn't understand a word. She is present at one of those massacres you glimpse on television before switching to another channel. The difference in this case is that war comes out of the television set and into your own world. The people directly involved in a war aren't the only ones involved. "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

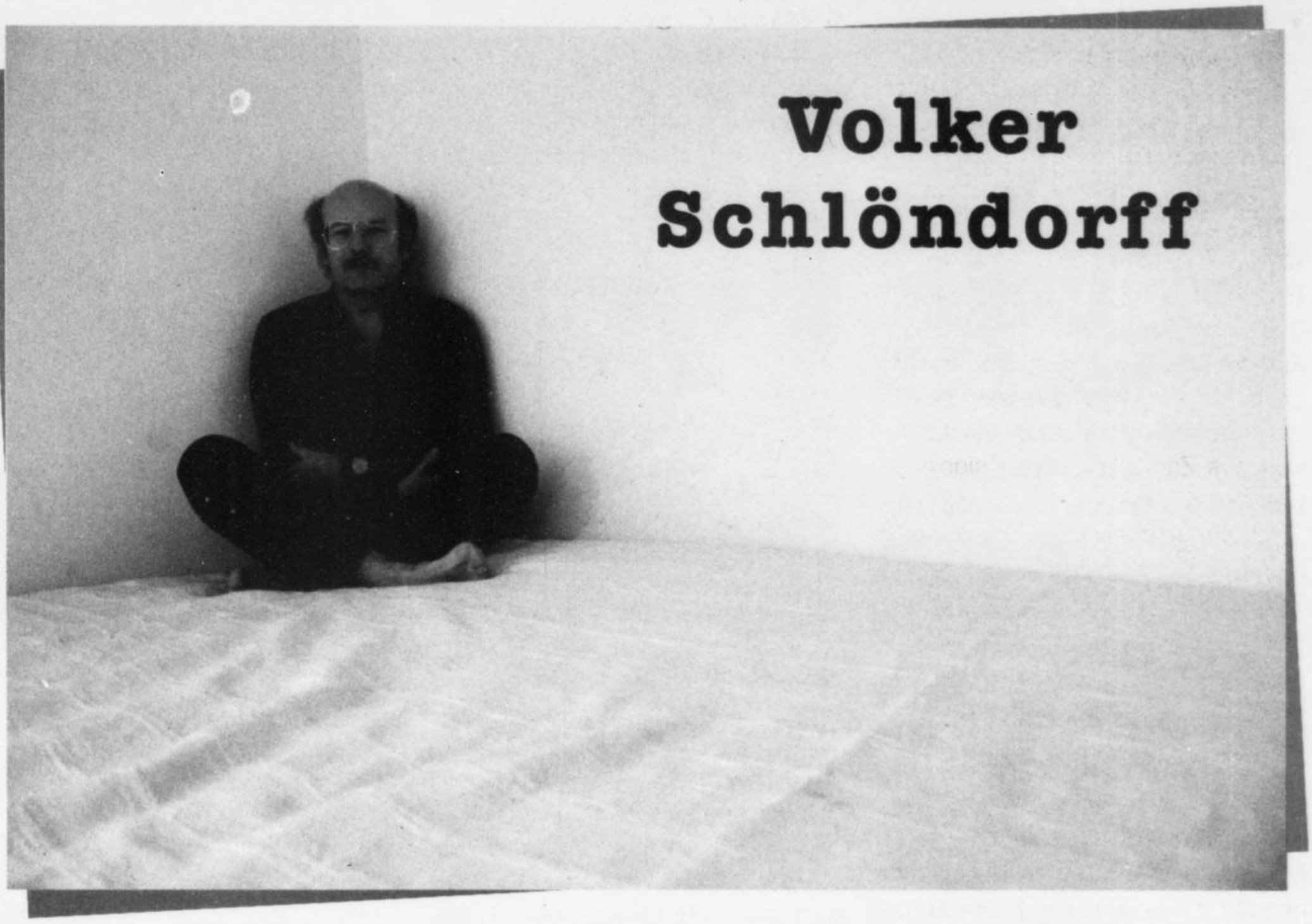
The young orthodox monk, Kiril (foreground), and Zamira, the young Albanian woman.

Did you have to make sacrifices in order to shoot your film?

— All directors make certain calculations. Those who make so-called art films do too. Talking about politics, putting in a dash of Surrealism, shooting some very slow scenes, projecting an image of the world as seen through the eyes of a child—these are often "gimmicks" that help you to sell yourself as a "director of art films". American cloak-and-dagger films and the kind of movies Arnold Schwarzenegger appears in are gimmicks of a different kind designed to attract another kind of audience. What I mean is that form in itself is neither a guarantee of quality nor a passport to mediocrity. A film should have both a highly emotive side and a very well-structured side. One of those two ingredients without the other results in kitsch. Together they create a contrast which gives an added dimension to the finished film.

I didn't come under any outside pressure when making *Before the Rain,* apart from a problem of time, in other words money. But that's all part of the job. ■

Volker Schlöndorff



Above, the German director Volker Schlöndorff. His *The Tin Drum* won the Golden Palm award at the 1979 Cannes Festival and a Hollywood Oscar for the Best Foreign-Language Film.

interview

What was the first film you ever saw?

— A kind of German spaghetti western called *The Children of Mara Mara*. I've never come across it again, but it made a very strong impression on me—it showed some children hung up on meat hooks, like in a butcher's. That was in 1953, when I was thirteen.

Had you never been to the cinema before that?

— No, never. We mainly listened to the radio. I remember that two or three years later I saw Jean Cocteau's *The Blood of a Poet*, and another highlight of that period was Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*.

Was that when you first wanted to make a film?

— What I wanted, when I was about fourteen, was to do something different; I didn't want to be a doctor or a lawyer, for example. Like a lot of teenagers I wrote poetry and short stories, but what I was looking for, even more than a means of self-expression, was a way of exploring the world. I remember being fascinated by an article in a magazine I found in the cellar, with pictures of a film crew on location somewhere in Africa—men in caps, camels, a camera on a tripod. I said to myself, that's what I want to do. I was also taking a lot of photographs at that time, but most of all I read. I was an avid reader, which explains the passion I still have for adapting literary works for the screen.

What did you read?

— A bit of everything, or perhaps I should say a lot of everything. As often happens in such cases I read everything too soon. I was fond of Faulkner, Hemingway and Balzac—I remember *La Peau de chagrin* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* very vividly—not forgetting Dostoevski. I must have been twelve when I read Schopenhauer: "It's not at all the sort of thing for you," my father said.

Why did you come to France?

— To learn French. When I was about fifteen or sixteen I went to a school in Vannes. A Jesuit there had a great influence on me; we saw eye to eye in matters of theology, philosophy and the cinema. It was at the school film club that I developed my knowledge of, and love for, the cinema. I saw what we used to call the "classics", from Buster Keaton to Carl Dreyer, and discovered the great pre-war German directors, Fritz Lang in particular. A little later I got to know the work of Friedrich Murnau, Ewald André Dupont—I'm thinking of his film *Variety*—and Lupu-Pick.

What about the films that were coming out then?

— I was impressed by many of them, especially Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, with Marlon Brando, which opened my eyes to the fact that the cinema was capable of doing something about injustice. There was also Alain Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) with its powerful revelation of the death camps, and, in a very different register, Henri Verneuil's *Please, Mr. Balzac*, with Brigitte Bardot and Darry Cowl, and Federico Fellini's *Il Bidone* (*The Swindlers*).

In what way did they affect you?

— I gradually realized that making films is a proper job that has to be learned. After getting my school-leaving certificate in France I enrolled at IDHEC, the French school of cinematography, but I didn't take the course. . . . In fact, owing to a series of coincidences I was taken on as a trainee by Louis Malle. He was making *Zazie dans le métro* at the time. That was my real introduction to directing. I've been in films ever since. . . .

How did your career develop?

— It began in France, where I worked under Jean-Pierre Melville and Louis Malle, and then I decided I wanted to be a German director and went back to Germany. The first film I made, in 1965, was *Der Junge Törless* ("Young Törless"), based on the novel by the Austrian writer Robert Musil. It went down well. I then made two more pictures with the actor and film director Margarethe von Trotta. In 1978, my adaptation of the Günter Grass novel *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*) won awards at Cannes and in Hollywood. I was deeply involved in the German film movement of the 1960s and 1970s alongside Alexander Kluge, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Peter Fleischmann, Werner Herzog and others. When that movement broke up, I left for the United States, where I worked mainly for television. I also made *Swann in Love*, based on Proust's novel.

Volker Schlöndorff's *Young Törless* (Fed. Rep. of Germany, 1966), based on a story by Robert Musil, with Matthieu Carrière (left) in the title role.

Young David Bennent in Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum* (Fed. Rep. of Germany, 1979), based on Günter Grass's novel of the same name.

What are your recollections of the United States?

— The working conditions were excellent, and I made films with such Hollywood legends as Dustin Hoffman and Richard Widmark. But I find it hard to accept that films are ordinary commercial products. I believe that film-making, whether it is an art as some people claim or just a means of expression, deserves better. The absolute power enjoyed by producers and distributors in the United States gets in the way of such expression—at least as far as I'm concerned! Directors have to wage a hard, endless struggle that in the long run wears out even the most resilient.

All the same, I would be happy to go back to the United States to make a film. I have some good friends there, especially Billy Wilder, who made *Some Like it Hot*, an amusing, astute man. I go along with his idea that film directors are showmen. . . .

▸ What does he mean by that, exactly?

— He says a director is like a music-hall magician. He gets about the same amount of applause every evening but now and again, when he is in the middle of his act, a beautiful naked woman crosses the stage behind him, unbeknown to him, and the audience goes wild. He goes home that night, well pleased with himself, thinking: "That's it, I've found how to do it, I've made it!" The next day he's back on stage, raring to go. . . .

▸ But the naked lady, in other words the sudden incursion of life, fails to materialize?

— Not that evening. It's impossible to know when she will appear, but the important thing is that she doesn't walk out on us, that we still have a chance. . . .

▸ After the United States you returned to Germany. . . .

— Yes, I moved around. I made another film, my most recent, *The Voyager*, based on the novel *Homo Faber* by the German-speaking Swiss writer Max Frisch. Then, in 1990, an outstanding opportunity occurred, the possibility of taking over the legendary Babelsberg studios of which I am now director. These studios, at Potsdam, near Berlin, in the former German Democratic Republic, embody the whole history of German cinema. After reunification the question of what to do with Babelsberg arose. The technical facilities were in a dilapidated state and everything needed seeing to. I hesitated at first but then took the plunge, helped by my old friend Peter Fleischmann. Now the studios are coming back to life and in a little while we may well have Europe's finest movie factory.

▸ Is European cinema still a feasible proposition?

— Very much so. In the first place there is the heartening example of French cinema, which has managed to stand up for itself better than the others and is doing well. We shall try and take a lesson from the French legislation. We are also encouraged by the upturn in cinema attendance in Germany and Britain, in addition to which it seems obvious to me that, in the cinema as in other spheres, Europe still has plenty to say and plenty to offer. Diversity is Europe's strong point.

▸ But surely the American cinema dominates the market in Europe, as it does elsewhere.

— In the movie theatres, yes, but television is different. On television, most of the big hits—I'm talking about feature films—are domestic products. There's no question of closing the door to American film imports; that would be ridiculous, and impossible in any case! We simply have to explain patiently and in simple terms, as we aim to do in all our discussions and negotiations with European institutions, that there is room for another form of cinema. This ambitious, high-quality cinema is European cinema; but it is also the rest of world cinema, that of Nikita Mikhalkov, Zhang Yimou, Abbas Kiarostami, Souleymane Cissé and a thousand other young directors who will all go under if we go under, without having had the opportunity to make a film. Don't forget that as well as producing films Europe also coproduces them, in Europe itself and outside of Europe.

▸ So there is no cause for pessimism?

— Nor for complacency. The struggle ahead will be long, hard and complicated, since it involves both economic and artistic considerations.

▸ What about the crisis in the cinema?

—That's nothing new. All my films were made in a state of crisis, so. . . .

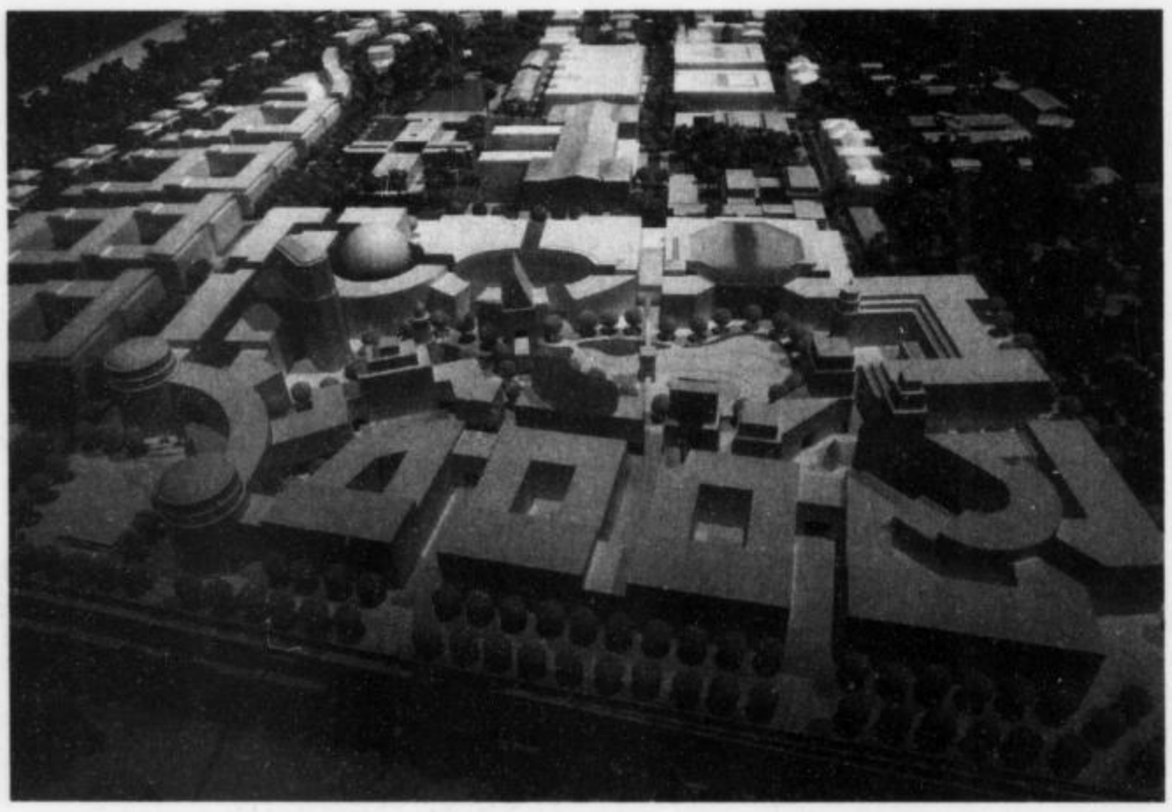
▸ So you think the crisis is more apparent than real?

— Of course not: Europe's film output, for instance, has fallen off considerably. We have not always been aware of the danger ahead, but there is no cinema crisis as such. In point of fact, more films are being seen today than ever before. The difference is that now we often watch them at home, on television or on video. Does that mean the cinema is weaker, is cinema-going no longer the incomparable experience that set my heart beating faster when I saw *On the Waterfront* at the age of fifteen? The answer depends on us. ■

Ornella Muti and Jeremy Irons in Volker Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love* (France-Fed. Rep. of Germany, 1984).

The Babelsberg

Many of the stars of German cinema were born at the legendary Babelsberg Studios outside Berlin. The first studio was built there in 1912—its walls constructed entirely of glass—on a 40,000-square-metre site acquired the year before by the Bioscop film company. In the next eighty years some 2,500 films would be made at Babelsberg.



Architect's model of the Babelsberg Studios as they will develop in the 1990s.

Among those who helped to make the name of the new studios were the actress Asta Nielsen, Paul Wegener, director of *Der Golem* (1915), and Ernst Lubitsch, who produced seven films there in 1918, including his first international success, *Carmen*, with Pola Negri. Two great directors whose careers were closely associated with Babelsberg in the 1920s were Fritz Lang (*Metropolis*, 1927) and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (*Nosferatu*, 1922). Germany's first sound stages were built at Babelsberg in 1929, and in 1930 *The Blue Angel* was made there with Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings in the leading roles.

After the nationalization of the German film industry in 1938-1939, Babelsberg fell under the control of Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels and his machine. By then the industry was already suffering from the exodus of talent which began in the early 1930s when directors such as Lang and Douglas Sirk fled the Nazi regime and went to America.

After the Second World War, the state film company DEFA Film AG was established at Babelsberg and went on to produce over 700 features, including 150 films for children.

Right, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), a classic of German cinema.

Opposite page, Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (Germany, 1929-1930), featuring Marlene Dietrich (foreground) as the singer, Lola-Lola.

Studios

Between 1959 and 1990, the studio made over 600 TV films. Since 1992 the sound studios have been renovated as part of a large-scale investment programme and an international centre of multiple media activities is being set up. Today Babelsberg (which attracted over 500,000 visitors in 1994) is on the way to becoming a veritable media city with commercial, service and educational facilities, hotels, cinemas and restaurants. **N. T.**■

The Babelsberg studios in the late 1930s.

UNESCO IN ACTION

Yesterday's images for tomorrow's eyes

by Thereza Wagner

At UNESCO's Paris Headquarters on 19 October 1994 UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor appointed French actress Catherine Deneuve UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador for the safeguard of the cinematic heritage.

The advent of the talkies in the 1930s coincided with the founding of the first film archives. The Swedish Film Institute was created in 1933; the Reichsfilmarchiv in Berlin was founded in 1935 (it ceased to exist after the Second World War), as were the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in New York and the National Film Library in London. The French Cinémathèque was established in Paris in 1936.

Even then, it was estimated that 80 per cent of the negatives of silent films had been lost, either because of destruction on a massive scale with the coming of the talkies, or because they were gradually withdrawn from the market, stored, and then disposed of to make room for more recent works or as a precaution against fire*.

The first task awaiting the film libraries was thus to persuade the major producers to lend or give a copy of each of their films for safe-keeping. Although at first considered an unusual request, this initiative eventually came to be accepted by the film industry as a way of helping to maintain the commercial value of films in a volatile market.

Different approaches To begin with the libraries had two distinct functions. One was that promoted by Ernest Lindgren, the first director of the National Film Library in London. Lindgren argued that film libraries should collect films, preserve them, make inventories of them, store them in decent conditions, establish national filmographies and index collections. A different point of view was put forward by Henri Langlois, founder of the French Cinémathèque, who wanted to encourage research into and study of the art of cinema, a field which until then had been hardly explored. This meant that films held in archives should be shown to the public.

These two viewpoints soon became antagonistic and divided archivists who after 1936 were affiliated to the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). This conflict only came to an end in the 1980s.

It was around the same time that the "vinegar syndrome", a process whereby film

Thereza Wagner is a staff member of UNESCO's Section for the Promotion of Arts and Creativity.

stock deteriorates, whitening the images, appeared in films produced between 1950 and 1960 using cellulose-acetate film stock. This kind of film, which was widely used in the 1950s because of its non-inflammable nature, proved to be unreliable. About 60 per cent of acetate film is presently endangered.

The figure is considerably higher for film in developing countries where poor storage conditions accelerate deterioration. Unfortunately very little is being done in these countries, for people are not yet really aware of the immense loss the disappearance of the world's film heritage would represent. Furthermore, in this case restoration costs are proportionately far higher than the original production costs of the films themselves. In developing countries facilities for the storage, preservation and safeguarding of film are usually rudimentary.

Steps to save the film heritage

The size of the task is so great that several questions arise. What should be restored and what restoration methods should be used? Where should the restored heritage be kept?

Film archivists in the developed countries must preserve all "nitrate" films (those produced before 1950) because of their rarity. It is estimated that around three-quarters of these films have already been lost. Decisions must be taken concerning acetate-based films.

In the United States, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Woody Allen and a few other highly respected film-makers grew concerned that the colour of their films was deteriorating and in the late 1980s decided to create a company to protect them.

There are around a dozen film archives and libraries in the United States. They are currently restoring nitrate films with help from private foundations, but their collections are large and the work is far from finished.

Four years ago the Commission of the European Communities launched the "Lumière Project" to save the nitrate collections in member countries of what is now the European Union. With a similar end in view, UNESCO has decided to initiate a far-reaching international programme called "Let's Save the Cinematic Heritage", aimed especially at the developing countries. The programme is being carried out in co-operation with FIAF, to which more than 100 film libraries in some sixty countries are today affiliated.

Films to encourage tolerance

The programme covers the promotion, safeguard, protection and distribution of films and the cinematic heritage.

In terms of promotion, UNESCO is examining the possibility of drawing up a list of films that should be considered as national and international heritage. Work on this is being done within the framework of UNESCO's "Memory of the World" programme, in co-operation with states, film libraries and archives. In the same perspective, an international festival of restored and rediscovered films on the theme of tolerance was held in January 1995. It will be followed up by a publication for primary and secondary schools which will contain a list and description of the sixty most important films ever made on this subject.

As far as preservation and safeguard are concerned, UNESCO has recently created a fund with a special account for the restoration and protection of the cinematic heritage. A major international appeal will be made later this year for contributions to finance the fund, whose president is the French actress Catherine Deneuve, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the safeguard of the cinematic heritage.

UNESCO will also encourage the implementation of co-operation agreements between film libraries and archives in the rich and poor countries. With this in view, an extensive public information campaign will be held in order to promote the cinema and the moving image. This is a long-term undertaking and should be carried out in each country through film festivals, publications and other activities. ■

UNESCO's Federico Fellini medal, designed by Italian artist Valerio Adami and executed by French sculptor Robert Michel, is awarded in recognition of efforts by cinema professionals to promote the seventh art. It was presented for the first time on 24 May 1995 to Mr. Pierre Viot, president of the Cannes Film Festival.

* Until 1950 film negatives were made of nitro-cellulose, a highly inflammable substance prone to deterioration.

APPEAL BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Saving the cinematic heritage

Embracing as it does painting, theatre, music, literature and photography, the art of the cinema, which was invented in 1895, is the custodian of the memory of the twentieth century and one of the leading forms of expression of a changing world.

A product of human creative imagination and inventive genius, the art of the cinema developed along lines running counter to those of the other arts, in that its discovery and the progress it made were based on a technical invention. It owes its success, which was immediate, to the new dialogue it established with the public, where every spectator is under the illusion of actually being in the midst of the action caught on film. Film, the miracle of the moving image, abolishes spatial and temporal distance. It records, recounts, illustrates and invents.

Today, more than three-quarters of the perishable and highly inflammable nitrocellulose-based films made prior to the 1950s are lost for ever, while some 60 per cent of the cellulose-acetate films made after 1950 are threatened by a process of deterioration known as the "vinegar syndrome", which bleaches the image if the film is not properly conserved.

The wealth of images captured in art films, features, documentaries, full-length films, shorts, popular-science films, newsreels, instructional and educational films, cartoons and others, is in danger of disappearing forever. The cinema has to be saved.

Under its Constitution, UNESCO is responsible for "assuring the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of . . . works of art and monuments of history and science", and devotes itself to fostering the action needed to safeguard them. The conservation and restoration of the international cinematic heritage entail special problems that private support and spontaneous gestures cannot by themselves resolve. It is accordingly considered necessary to look for answers to them through partnership arrangements.

This is why, on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and of the Honorary Committee for the Celebration of the Centenary of the Cinema,

I solemnly appeal to the Member States of UNESCO to take appropriate legal, administrative and financial steps to set up or strengthen the structures that are essential for safeguarding the international cinematic heritage, such as film archives, film libraries, cinema museums and restoration laboratories. If this action is to be successful it will have to be carried out in consultation with the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), the specialist international organization whose membership includes more than 100 such archives in 63 UNESCO Member States.

I invite cinema specialists and

"The twentieth century will go down in history as the century that added a new art to the history of civilization: the seventh art. An art which, if we really make an effort to safeguard it, will preserve philosophy, history, daily life and the problems, emotions and attitudes of an entire age."

Melina Mercouri

(Greek Minister of Culture and actress)

"What would we do if negatives of *Amarcord* or of *And the Ship Sails On* were to disappear forever? Surely the works of Sembène Ousmane, Fernando Solanas, Mrinal Sen and Merzak Alouach also deserve to be protected? I am not convinced that it is necessary to appeal to intellectual snobbery, charity or clairvoyance to make people aware of the catastrophe that is threatening the cinema. I should prefer to think that it is through humanity, intelligence and above all through love for future generations that we will save the cinema."

Youssef Chahine

(Egyptian film-maker)

"Africa has a right to its image and its memory. We must preserve, but we must also help to distribute films in Africa. The African cinema must develop because Africa has something to contribute to the memory of the world. Africa wants to have its own image, to produce and preserve it."

Gaston Kaboré

(Burkinabé film-maker)

"I invite you to take action to defend the three fundamental rights of cinema pluralism: the right of all nations to develop their own cinema and to enable cinema and audiovisual works to

OF UNESCO

film-goers to join their efforts to those whose task it is in every country to ensure that their national cinema is safeguarded, so as to make it possible to compile exhaustive filmographies.

I invite film producers, actors, directors, technicians and operators to join forces, as they are already doing in some countries, and set up national foundations or associations to alert the public to the urgent need to preserve the national and international cinematic heritage; collect private or public funds to help finance the restoration of national film collections; encourage projects for creating copyright registration systems in countries where archives for the preservation of the cinematic heritage do not yet exist; and ensure that the national preservation practices introduced are consistent with the norms laid down by the International Federation of Film Archives.

I invite the photography, cinema, video and television industries, film producers and distributors and all industries concerned with cinema generally to participate generously in the national and internationl effort being made by associations and organizations to safeguard the cinematic heritage, by contributing to the creation of an international fund designed to defray the cost of film restoration and preservation work. This fund will be created in the International Federation of Film Archives and UNESCO*.

I invite cinema and television film producers holding rights to films or successors in title to join in the safeguarding operation by participating in it financially or setting up appropriate restoration programmes; I also ask them to do their utmost to facilitate the distribution of restored films in commercial and non-commercial circuits by concluding agreements with film distributors and distribution agencies.

I invite film festivals all over the world to create a section in their programmes on "films that have been saved" and to organize public showings with the co-operation of the International Council for Film, Television and Audiovisual Communication (IFTC).

I invite schools of film, television and the audiovisual professions to take appropriate steps, in conjunction with the International Liaison Centre for Film and Television Schools, to alert future professionals working in the film industry to the problems of conserving and safeguarding cinematic works.

I invite the industrialized countries to co-operate with the developing countries, so that the latter can successfully engage in research on their film production and ensure the training of conservation specialists through the requisite transfers of knowledge and technology.

In conclusion, I invite members of the international community, such as film critics, specialists, cinema-goers and others, to contribute in all appropriate ways to the movement to safeguard the cinema in conjunction with the national, regional and international bodies of the International Federation of Film Archives. ■

FEDERICO MAYOR

UNESCO Headquarters,
2 November 1993

* The UNESCO Fund for the Safeguarding of the Film Heritage was established in 1995. (Ed.)

be seen as the right of all authors and directors to express their aesthetic and cultural identity freely, and the right of all peoples to know and benefit from the films made by all the different nations of the world."

Fernando Solanas

(Argentine film-maker)

"Throughout Black Africa, South America and almost everywhere in Europe, cinemas, which were meeting places just as important in their own way as country churches, are closing down one after the other because, at their very doors, pirate video cassettes are sold for less than the price of cinema tickets. We are not asking you to set your face against progress, but we invite all of you, in your respective countries, to save these places of mass communion where, as Freddy Buache so neatly puts it, 'members of the audience together shared the same emotions.'"

Jean Rouch

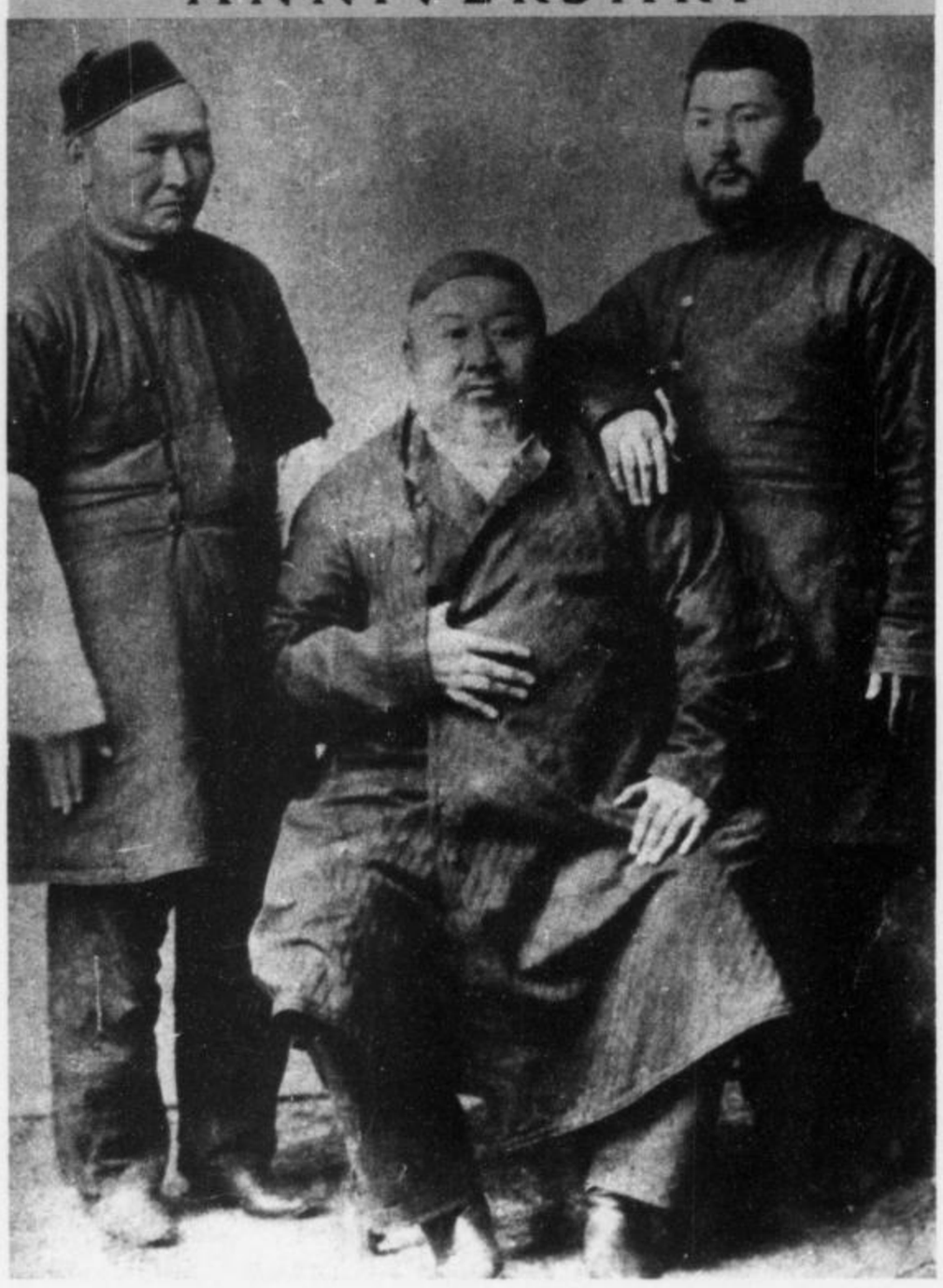
(French film-maker)

"We know that without libraries, literature would disappear, the memory of writing would die with its authors, everything would be contemporary, no worse than journalism but also no better—and the journalism not inspired by the epic and romantic forms of the past. What would our cinema look like if we had no memory of its development? The question is almost too banal, and yet we still treat that heritage as if it had no value. Arrangements for preservation and exhibition of past work fall far below what is barely necessary."

Colin Young

(International Liaison Centre for Film and Television Schools)

ANNIVERSARY



One of the few photos of Abai, here seen with his two sons.

Interview with Chingiz Aitmatov

ABAI KUNANBAYEV

(1845-1904)

The work of the Kirghiz writer Chingiz Aitmatov (b. 1928, the grandson of a nomadic shepherd) powerfully illustrates the conflict between modern society and ancient civilizations in the former Soviet Union, as well as confronting the problem of the future state of humanity and the world. Among his many short stories and novels translated into English are Jamilia *(1958),* The White Steamship *(1970) and* The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years *(1980). Here, to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Abai Kunanbayev, Aitmatov explains why the Kazakh poet's work is still relevant today.*

What does this commemoration mean to you?

— Historical changes in a society are often tied to a negative reappraisal of the values of the past, particularly in the perception of the importance of great figures from national and world culture. One only need remember how artists such as Gorky and Mayakovsky were treated during our Soviet era, whose embers are still hot.

Abai is above history: he served no government or ideology. He embodies both an ethnic and a personal inspiration, which has come to be identified with the destiny of his people, their struggles and their tragedies. Rooted in the spirit of his nation, he lived during an exceptionally complex period of Kazakh history. How could such a brilliant mind have emerged during this time in the remote steppes, so far from world events? It's impossible to explain.

He is not a story-teller who respects tradition and its rules, he is a civilizing genius, capable of reconstructing everything through his creative originality, of enriching the past and developing a new personal view of the world.

"I am without strength, I am here all alone. . . ," Abai lamented. "My soul is in mourning . . . my efforts are sterile. . . ." What if he had not been born "in a century of wolves, among a pack of wolves"? If he had lived in a more civilized age,

might he have developed his great talent even more?

— No. Abai emerged at a time when he was most needed. For the first time in its history, Turkestan was discovering, through Russia, the European ideas of the Enlightenment, which would have enormous consequences for the nomadic masses. Shortly after, these people would be hurled into destructive upheavals and live through two revolutions: that of 1917 and that of the 1990s, which rejects, annuls and disavows totally and categorically the revolution of 1917.

What was the significance of Abai's work during the period between these two revolutions?

What role did it play during the Soviet era?

— In a context in which totalitarianism was based primarily on the negation of the idea of the nation in the name of proletarian internationalism, Abai and the spiritual force that he represented were a shield that protected us.

Abai was a kind of sanctuary, a bastion for the Kazakh people. He enabled them to survive spiritually, to resist the power of imperialistic absorption. The heritage of his work preserved and inspired the Kazakh intelligentsia at a time when the dangers of nihilism were at their most critical and troubling. The neighbouring peoples are also deeply indebted to the greatness of Abai, in their struggle to preserve their distinctive languages and national spirit.

Like a tall, shady cedar in the mountains. . . .

Born in the Chingiz mountains, into a nomadic tribe, the Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904), usually known as Abai, transformed his people's language and the thematic range of their poetry through his work and the far-reaching influence of his personality. He denounced feudal customs, and called on his people to educate themselves and to unite. This year marks the 150th anniversary of his birth.

In describing the great Kazakh poet as "standing out in the history of his people like a tall, shady cedar in the mountains", his compatriot Muktar Auezov (d. 1961), the author of an epic novel about him (*The Journey of Abai*), summed up in an article written in 1954 Abai's unique contribution to Kazakh culture: "Abai's literary work (his lyric poetry, maxims and translations) was fed and watered from three major sources which blend harmoniously."First, the ancient Kazakh culture as established in the oral and written works of the past. . . . Second, the best examples of Eastern culture: classic poetry written in Tadzik, Azeri and Uzbek. Discernible since the beginning of the century, this tendency to turn towards neighbouring cultures has undoubtedly played a positive role in Kazakh culture. The third source is Russian, and through it, the whole of world culture. In Abai's time, tapping this source, particularly the great Russian classics, which before Abai were completely unknown to the Kazakhs, was a decisive force for progress.

"However, Abai—and this is the sign of his great originality and exceptional gifts—succeeded in remaining true to himself while drawing on these three sources. Like all creators of stature, he immersed himself in a new culture without losing his strong individuality as an artist and thinker."

Reach deep into your soul,
remain true to yourself.
To you I am an enigma, I and
my journey.
Understand, you who come after
me, that I am opening the way
for you.
I have had thousands of
adversaries, don't reproach me
for it!

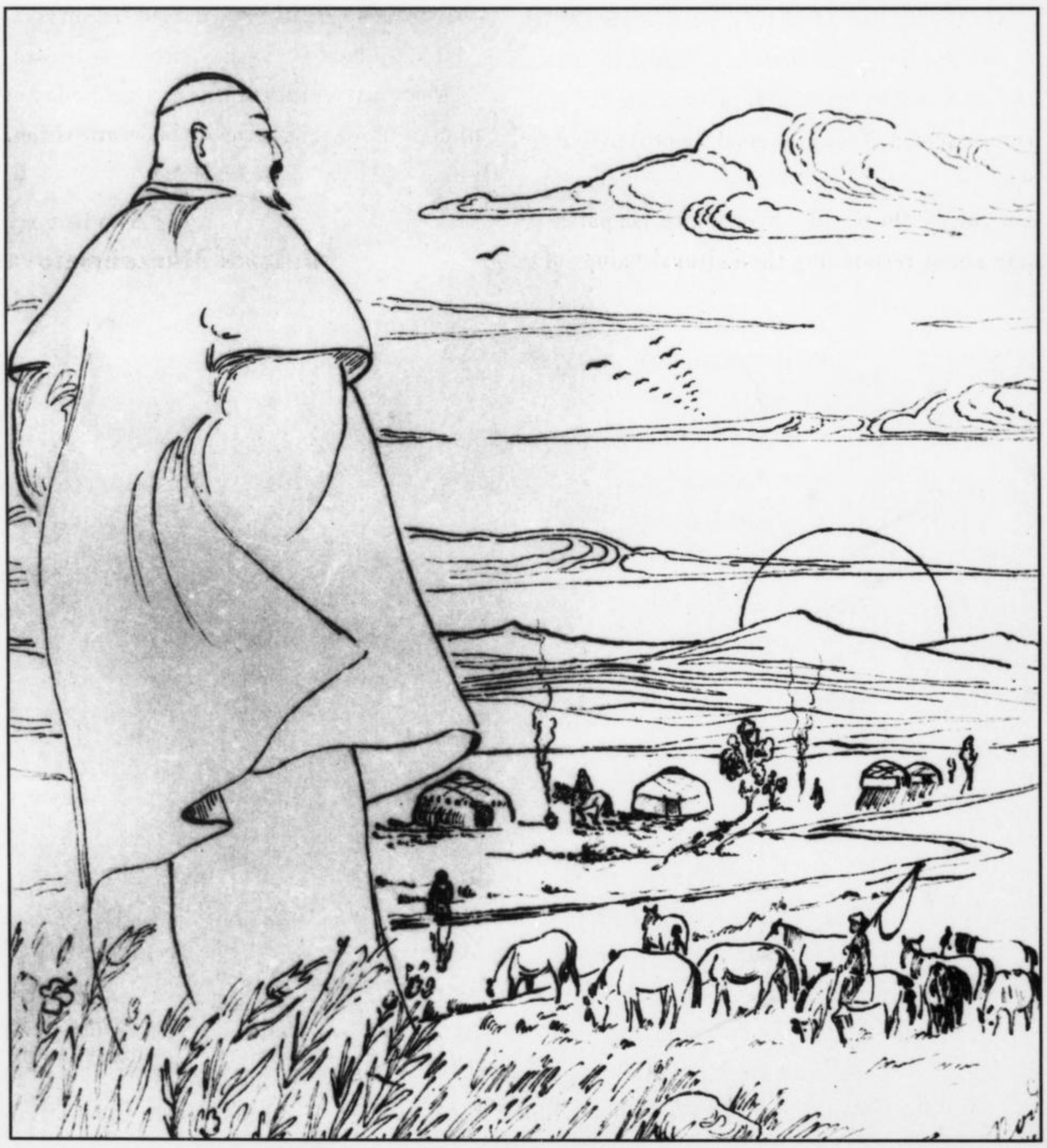
Abai

"After a harsh, snowy winter, doesn't spring follow, with its flowers, high waters and splendour?" Abai wrote. Are his ideas and his writings still relevant today?

— Today we are confronted with another picture, another era, another aspect of Abai. I am thinking of our everyday life today, at a time when the democratic process has led to a radically different situation. We are faced with another extreme. Populist nationalism is playing a reactionary, illogical role, that of a blind driver on whom it would be dangerous to rely.

When it is out of control, the euphoria of the national independence, sovereignty and freedom that actually have been won during the democ-

An illustration by K. K. Kongir (1914-1986) for a collection of Abai's poems published in the late 1940s.



ratization process, through the joint action of entire peoples—by the liberation of the centre as well as the old periphery—is transformed into ambition run riot. It has become a disintegrating force, ruling out much-needed co-operation between all national cultures.

Abai openly warned against all forms of obtuse and blinkered nationalism. . . .

— Populist and chauvinist demagogy, which is so fashionable and seemingly productive in the short term, actually exacerbates the vanity of national self-satisfaction. This leads to a provincial outlook and, ultimately, to isolation, an inferiority complex and a weakening of the role of elites who cease to take part in the development of common values. Without such values, a people ceases to develop.

On the horizon of history, Abai appears as an astonishingly contemporary figure, a man endowed with a particularly penetrating vision, a true prophet. Today is a good moment to think of his ideas about the need for an ecumenical approach to the world's diversity, and in particular about reconciling the cultural values of East and West—that is, the values of our Asian background and those of Russian culture, whose historical mission is to act as a link.

Abai attached great importance to this characteristic of Russian culture. At the same he remained profoundly Kazakh in his way of thinking. He loved his people and was proud of them, but he also called on them to be self-critical. He presented his compatriots with the unvarnished truth, refused to indulge a misplaced national pride, and denounced the defects and obscurantism of an ignorant nation.

All this has great relevance today, at a time when nationalism is becoming a reactionary political force, when the great democratic figures of the past as well as the great Russian philosophers are being reassessed in a nationalistic perspective.

During the totalitarian era, Abai embodied the national spirit and encouraged the survival of the Kazakh nation. Today, in the post-totalitarian era, his role is that of a spiritual unifier of national cultures, based on a democratic vision. His message lives on in a new age. ■

Interview by
Gulzada Murzahmetova

The School in the Steppe (1911), oil on canvas by N. G. Khludov.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISCOVERIES

To my mind, by far the most interesting issue of the *Courier* published so far this year is the April number on "the origins of writing". For me it was an opportunity to make two discoveries.

First of all the great Afro-American writer Ernest J. Gaines. Until then the only Afro-American writers whose work I knew were Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and James Baldwin. I am delighted that Afro-American literature is at last being recognized and appreciated throughout the world. How about an article or an interview featuring Maya Angelou?

I owe my second discovery to Isabelle Leymarie's article about the sacred Indian dance-form known as Odissi. Perhaps like many other *Courier* readers, I was hitherto familiar only with the Bharata Natyam form. Apart from anything else, dancer Devasmita Patnayik is an exceptional personality who is totally devoted to her art, which, as she says, is an offering, a devotional act and a quest for perfection all in one. This is an attitude that believers in all religions should apply to daily life, especially in their relationships with others.

It seems to me that the ideas expressed by Devasmita Patnayik and Mr. Federico Mayor's appeal, elsewhere in the issue, for a rehabilitation of spiritual values and for a responsible attitude towards the environment, go a long way to fulfil the wish expressed in the "Letters" column of the same issue by a reader from Grand-Quevilly (France) to the effect that the *Courier* should offer its readers some examples of enlightened approaches to today's problems.

Keep up the good work!

THIERRY LAMBERT
Laon (France)

THE NINTH BORDEAUX BOOK FAIR

The *UNESCO Courier* will be participating in the 9th Bordeaux Book Fair (France) from 5 to 8 October 1995. This year's Fair, the main theme of which is "Literature and Cinema", will present a broad panorama of today's publishing world and welcome more than 200 authors. Special attention will be devoted to the French poet Jean de la Fontaine, the 300th anniversary of whose birth is being celebrated this year, the Andalusian poet Rafael Alberti, and French novelist Jean Giono, who was born a hundred years ago. An exhibition, round table discussions and film screenings will highlight Giono's work, including his lesser known activities as a scriptwriter and film-maker. For further information contact the Salon du Livre de Bordeaux, 139, Cours Balguerie-Stuttenberg, 33300 Bordeaux. Tel: (33) 56 43 04 35.

ZOROASTRIAN DEBATE

I would like to clarify one of the positions taken in your January 1995 issue ("The Sun, Ancient Myths, New Technologies").

The dates of Zoroaster's life have been much debated by specialists, who place them between 4000 B.C. and 600 B.C.; most recent scholars tend to place him about 1500 B.C. To give his dates unequivocally (as you did on page 17) as "c. 628-551 B.C." is not entirely factual and is misleading.

ROHINTON M. RIVETNA
FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America)
Quebec (Canada)

THE TORAH AND THE PENTATEUCH

The word "Torah" is not, as claimed on page 14 of your May 1995 issue ("The Pilgrim's Way"), "a Hebrew translation of the Greek word 'Pentateuch'". Purely Hebraic in origin, it means "law" or "teaching", and designates the first five books of the Bible. The earliest translation of these books from Hebrew into Greek, forms part of the famous translation known as the Septuagint, and was undertaken in the 3rd century B.C. by seventy Jewish scholars in Alexandria. The word "Pentateuch" was used by the Greek translators to designate these books.

MEIR LEKER
Paris (France)

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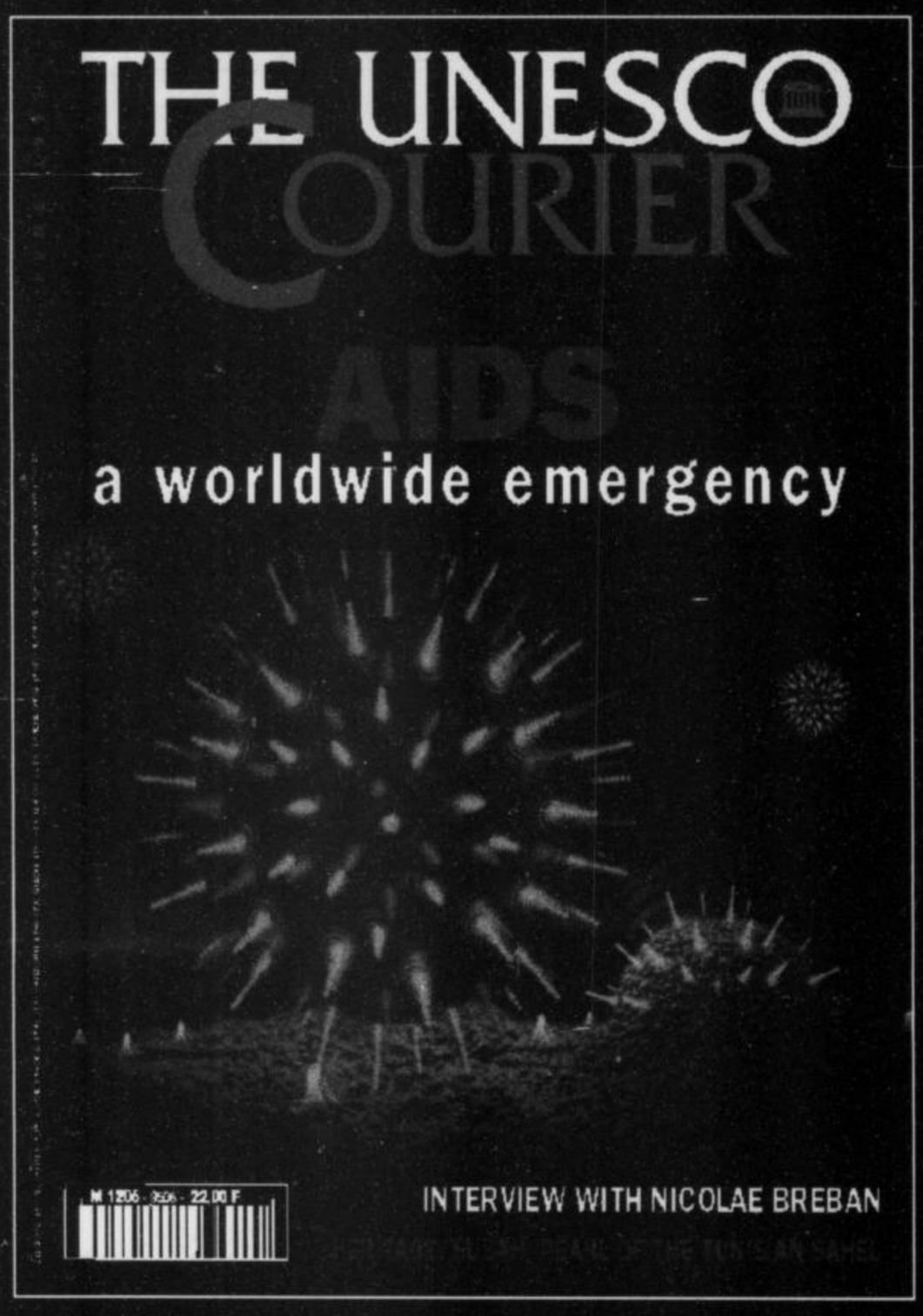

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